

**THE ART THEATRE MOVEMENT IN NEW YORK CITY, 1909-1932:  
A STUDY OF THE HISTORY AND IDEOLOGY OF TEN THEATRES**

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

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## ABSTRACT OF THESIS

An 'Art Theatre', as the term is used in this thesis, was an ideologically motivated organization which set itself up in opposition to the commercial theatre to provide alternative artistic policies and ways of conducting theatrical affairs. The American Art Theatres discussed and denounced commercialism as the main incentive to produce plays and demanded that artistic concerns be restored to their rightful prominence. They wanted to replace ad hoc production organizations with permanent, co-operative groups. If they felt that artistic considerations demanded it, they were prepared to abandon the general audience and entertain special minorities. In contrast to the ostentatiousness of commercial theatre, they preferred simple surroundings which would not come between the spectator and the play. They wanted repertory schedules instead of unlimited runs, to enable the plays they believed in to be more readily revived. And above all, they wanted to experiment in every aspect of production from playwriting to scene design. This study examines ten Art Theatres, in New York City, selected for being both representative of a movement spreading across the United States and especially important in its development. They are the American Laboratory Theatre, the Civic Repertory Theatre, the Jewish Art Theatre, the Little Theatre, the Neighborhood Playhouse, the New Playwrights' Theatre, the New Theatre, the Provincetown, the Theatre Guild and the Washington Square Players. The study, which seeks to set out the history of these

organizations and to show them in combination as a homogeneous movement, falls into three parts. The first part discusses the commercial background to the movement, examines the ideologies of the theatres separately and together and gives an account of the putting into practice of these ideals. The second explores the ways in which the theatres co-operated in more practical ways. In the third part, there are biographical sketches, a chronology, a descriptive list of plays presented at the theatres and a selected bibliography for reference.

PREFACE

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To my knowledge, no detailed study has been written about the 'Art Theatre movement' which grew up in America in the years after the beginning of this century. Of the very little published material with a bearing on the subject, there have been accounts of some individual theatres such as the Civic Repertory Theatre, the Cleveland Playhouse, the Provincetown and the Theatre Guild but, for the movement itself, authors have dealt with it briefly in the most general of terms. Its importance in history has long been taken for granted but its particulars passed over almost as if too well-known to deserve closer attention. Hence its details remain obscure. Of the unpublished material, there are dissertations of varying quality on theatres other than those mentioned above but, here again, no more synthesizing study has been done. It happens also that the information available in published form and in dissertations from contemporary reminiscences to historical analysis is of such an uneven and generally unsound kind that almost invariably I have had to return to original sources.

In Ronald Willis' unpublished 'The American Laboratory Theatre: 1923-1930', he suggests that the relationship of the American Laboratory Theatre to America's independent theatre movement (i.e. 'Art Theatre movement') might constitute another full dissertation study. The following then is, in part, just such an inquiry.

The essential sources of information on the Art Theatres and the Art Theatre movement are principally on file in the theatre collections of the New York Public Library and Harvard University.

They consist primarily of office records, programmes, play bills and reviews. Where such sources are cited in this thesis, I have used the abbreviations 'NYPL.TC.' and 'H.TC.'. Sometimes they are in a well-preserved state. Often they are incomplete or fragmentary. When their condition makes it impossible to give a detailed description, I have supplied all the information available and offered occasional, conjectural details within square brackets. Further sources are on file at the Yivo Institute (New York), the Museum of the City of New York, Brandeis University (Waltham, Massachusetts) and the Provincetown Museum (Massachusetts).

Several people active in the Art Theatres are still alive and have proved willing to be interviewed or to correspond about the movement; and I am happy and grateful to cite some of the information they have supplied.<sup>1</sup> In general, however, I found their statements inaccurate when it was possible to check them and therefore I have preferred to use their impressions and recollections only to recapture some of the atmosphere of the movement and not its facts.

This study of the Art Theatre movement in New York City from the opening of the New Theatre in 1909 to the closing of the Civic Repertory Theatre in 1932, falls into three parts. In the first part, Chapters I - X, I shall discuss the ideological structure of the Art Theatres which I take to be representatives

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1. Where American spellings appear in cited material, I have reproduced them as written. I have chosen to use English forms elsewhere.



of the movement, draw their ideals together in comparison, consider how they were carried into effect and trace their historical background. I have chosen not to devote separate chapters to each theatre in turn because I wished to discuss the theatres in greater comparative detail. Instead, I have preferred to take the main points of Art Theatre ideology and discuss each of these separately in terms of the ideology and history of the individual theatres which make up the group. I hope that this approach, despite its tendency to produce a repetitive structure for each chapter and some unavoidable overlaps between chapters, will make for better reading than a theatre-by-theatre approach. In the second part, Chapter XI, I shall describe how the same Art Theatres were related in ways other than commonly held ideology.

From this analysis, I hope not only to give an insight into the histories of individual Art Theatres but also to show how, together, they combined to form a coherent and homogeneous movement. In the Appendices and Bibliography which make up the third part, I set out additional information for reference, including biographical sketches, a chronology and a full play list.

I would like to give special thanks to my tutors and good friends Dr. Roger Savage, of the Department of English Literature, and Mr. Owen Dudley Edwards, of the Department of History, for their encouragement, guidance, patience and unwavering bonhomie. I

would also like to thank Professor George Shepperson, Professor James Cornford, Dr. Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones and all members of the Committee for the North American Studies Programme under whose auspices this is the first dissertation to be submitted for the degree of Ph.D. I am indebted to Jeanne Newlin of the Harvard Theatre Collection, Paul Myers of the New York Public Library, Maggie Blackmon of the Museum of the City of New York, Bina Abramovitz of the Yivo Institute and their staffs for their invaluable assistance. Ellen Hughes has given me advice; Janet Hadda helped me with lengthy translations from the Yiddish; Scott Ballantyne reproduced all the illustrations; Nira Laing and Sylvia Motherwell typed my manuscript. Finally I would like to express my gratitude to many people once active in the Art Theatres of New York for their willingness to be interviewed or to correspond on the subject: to Richard Aldrich, Sarah Armes, Romney Brent, Morris Carnovsky, Harold Clurman, Katherine Cornell, Francis Fergusson, Paul Green, Katherine Huntingdon, Mordecai Gorelik, Eva Le Gallienne, Aline MacMahon, Agnes Morgan, Warren Munsell, Donald Oenslager, Samson Raphaelson and Thornton Wilder.

I myself take full responsibility for any errors of judgement or fact.

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VOLUME I

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## CHAPTER I

### TOWARDS A DEFINITION OF 'ART THEATRE'

The undersigned believe that there is in this City an urgent call for the establishment of a Theatre, devoted to the cause of Art only, and not in any way to the cause of profit.

'The New Theatre'. Clipping /1908/. H.TC.



In the years between 1909 and 1932, many writers used the term 'Art Theatre' to describe certain kinds of American theatres. They and later historians, however, used the term interchangeably with other terms and gave the term Art Theatre itself different meanings, making it almost impossible to speak of such a phenomenon as 'the 'Art Theatre' movement without reviewing its definition. Here is an appropriate starting point from which to explore the background to the 'Art Theatre', by looking briefly at the wide variety of theatre characteristics which are revealed by some alternative and contrasting terms.

In its simplest sense 'Art Theatre' was used to separate those few theatres which sought to offer fundamentally different conditions of production and different artistic policies to participants and audience from the majority which did not. It had meaning principally in contrast to terms like 'legitimate', 'Broadway' and 'commercial theatre', used to define the prevalent character of playhouses and plays in America. 'Legitimate theatre', a term derived from an earlier period before 'Art Theatre' was ever employed in America, distinguished those theatres producing straight dramas or musical revues from vaudeville, burlesque or moving picture houses. When vaudeville and burlesque declined and a clearly separate movie industry developed, it persisted to some extent to distinguish the same theatres from newer groups of theatres of different kinds. In the same way, 'Broadway' outlasted its earliest usage when it described merely the theatre district as opposed to the business district of Manhattan Island, to define that majority of larger

theatres which produced particularly glamorous, unrestrained shows on or around Broadway in distinction to the productions of any smaller, remoter theatres of different character. To pass over such vague and emotive terms like the 'Great White Way' and the 'Great Trite Way', contemporary writers by the 1920s were most commonly using the expression 'commercial theatre' to describe the 'Art Theatre's' dominant neighbour. 'Commercial theatre' characterized those theatre organizations or productions which were created primarily to make financial profits as distinct from those which were not. It is this term, because of its greater contemporary currency and precision, that I shall use throughout this study as 'Art Theatre's' antithesis.

The 'Art Theatres' were essentially not commercial theatres. But the same could be said about many organizations during the 'Art Theatre' era. And a great many closely related terms were current to describe them. One of the most general and inclusive was 'new theatre'. Contemporary authors used the term indiscriminately, even more so than the terms legitimate and Broadway, so that no characteristic group of theatres is identifiable. In 1913, for example, Huntly Carter's The New Spirit in Drama and Art appeared, soon followed by Sheldon Cheney's The New Movement in the Theatre.<sup>1</sup> In 1924 Barrett H. Clark contributed 'New Trends in the Theatre' to the Forum.<sup>2</sup> T.H. Dickinson's Playwrights of

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1. New York, 1913; and New York, 1914.

2. November, 1924.

the New American Theatre was published in 1925; in 1926, Huntly Carter's The New Spirit in the European Theatre.<sup>1</sup> For Carter, new theatre meant the spirit of Reinhardt in Europe, for Dickinson, a regenerated interest in plots and character.

In more precise distinction to commercial theatre was 'amateur theatre'. The term described those groups, increasing in numbers after the turn of the century as commercial theatre declined outside New York, which produced plays for scarcely any financial reward or none at all. At one extreme they might be tinged with social exclusiveness, a diversion for small social circles of the kind George Kelly depicted in The Torchbearers;<sup>2</sup> at the other they might be dedicated to the highest artistic standards.

The term 'college theatre' encompassed a wide range of school- and university-based activities, from annual Fraternity Christmas festivities to occasional academic courses. Formal courses grew rapidly during the 1920s. By 1929, the writer and producer Kenneth Macgowan reported roughly one hundred and fifty universities engaged in practical instruction, with facilities ranging from simple classrooms to professionally staffed theatres like Yale's.<sup>3</sup>

Writers used the terms 'community' or 'local theatre' to distinguish theatres of a neighbourhood character. They could be professional or amateur, as small as the Dallas Little Theatre, for example, or as large as the Pasadena Playhouse. They might belong

1. New York, 1925; and 1926.

2. New York, 1924. See also K. Macgowan, Footlights Across America (New York, 1929), pp.47,352.

3. Op.cit., 'The College Theatre', pp.107-31.



to a racial or language group or simply to a definite geographical area.<sup>1</sup>

Clearly the authors who used terms like new, amateur, college, community, or local were not using words of fixed, generally agreed meaning. Nor were the objects of their attention exclusively one type of theatre or another. Rather, they used terms freely to pick out certain qualities of the theatres with which they were concerned, theatres to which they might attach other terms in different contexts. 'Little' or 'intimate theatre', for example, could be used to describe many of the kinds of theatre I have already mentioned. These terms primarily linked together theatres by taking only the size of their houses as a criterion. T.H. Dickinson acknowledged the catholic nature of little theatre in The Insurgent Theatre, while going on to give it his own definition:

It is not a repertory theatre in that while it may use the repertory principle, it is something more than a repertory theatre. It is not a municipal theatre,<sup>2</sup> though it may serve the purpose. It is not an endowed theatre for the reason that the best little theatres often work without any funds. And it is not an experimental theatre any more than any venture starting to work in untried fields is experimental. It is a building; it is a principle of economical management; it is a co-operative guild of artists of the theatre; and it is a system of alliance with the federated audience.<sup>3</sup>

In The Little Theatre in the United States, Constance D'Arcy Mackay preferred to attribute to it the more basic characteristic of 'an intimate stage ... where players and audience can be brought into close accord'. But, like Dickinson, she included other

1. See for example M. Beegle and J. Crawford, Community Drama and Pageantry (New Haven, 1916).
2. i.e. community theatre.
3. The Insurgent Theatre (New York, 1917), p.76.

criteria: its work was distinguished by 'unusual non-commercial plays', 'repertory and subscription', 'scenic experimentation', '"love of drama", not "love of gain"' and employing 'artists or potential artists in the craft of acting, of playwriting, of stage decoration or stage management'.<sup>1</sup> And the critic Helen Penniman answered her own question 'What Is the Little Theatre Movement?' in terms of small theatres bringing together literature, design, acting and music - all the theatre arts - into a new synthesis on stage, with their foyers and extra rooms serving the same purpose as public art centres, bookshops, libraries and exhibition galleries.<sup>2</sup>

Both Dickinson and Mackay refer to a 'non-commercial' or 'endowed theatre'. Here the artistic policies of the theatre superseded the more normal profit motive. They mention an 'experimental' or 'insurgent theatre' where traditional artistic policies are rejected. And there was an 'independent theatre', similarly 'opposed in various ways to the typical methods of standard commercial production'.<sup>3</sup>

All these terms, which are now often comprehended by the inclusive expressions 'off-Broadway' or 'off-off-Broadway', were current in the 1909-1932 period. Often they were used loosely: one prominent critic could write of 'the Experimental, Little,

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1. The Little Theatre (New York, 1917), p.1.
  2. Baltimore Evening Sun, February 10, 1919. See also C. Perry, The Work of the Little Theatres (New York, 1933), p.9; and L.V. De Foe, 'The Intimate Theatre Movement Has Gone the Way of Other Fads', New York World, November 10, 1918.
  3. R. Willis, 'The American Laboratory Theatre: 1923 - 1930', Diss. University of Iowa 1968, p.4; cf. 'Plan to Finance ...', New York Sun, April 17, 1926. Clipping, NYPL.TC.; and see for example T.H. Dickinson, The Insurgent Theatre (New York, 1917), p.10.



"Art" Theatre - call it what you like'.<sup>1</sup> And members of the theatres themselves contributed to the confusion by naming their organizations in ways which did not conform to their primary type at all: one would say for example that the Chicago 'Little' Theatre was more important for its experiment than for its size. But all the terms more or less served the purpose of their users in picking out characteristics to which they wished to draw attention.

The term 'Art Theatre' had no more precise meaning, so closely related as it was to other terms. It is only perhaps the most appropriate to describe the particular theatres I mean to examine. In 1917, the critic Sheldon Cheney depicted a kind of theatre he called the 'Art Theatre' in his book of the same name: these theatres were 'in the hands of artists, who, if immature and unsteady, were still sincere and forward looking'. They were simply more interested in their art than in fame or fortune:

The term is applied to a theatre group or a theatre institution striving to serve its audiences with theatrical productions that are the most expressive, the truest to the theatre and life of the times, that living artists - actors, scene-designers, directors - can evolve. The term 'art theatre' need not imply any narrow preoccupation with one code, one method, one theory.... The art theatre is the home of the living theatrical arts, the home of stage creativeness.

The art of the 'Art Theatre' was not the art of the commercial theatre. Commercial theatre art was an art 'that will please the greatest number of people ... that finds its appeal in sentiment and prettiness and sexual emotion and situations

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1. B.H. Clark, Theatre 1929 (December, 1928), p.9.  
Clipping, NYPL.TC.

begetting uncontrollable laughter - a sort of Cosmopolitan - Snappy - Stories - Ladies' - Home-Journal sort of art'.<sup>1</sup>

For the purpose of this study I would like to develop this definition further. The organization of the 'Art Theatre' was likely to be more integrated and harmonious as it worked to bring its plays to production with every artistic element in unity and balance. The theatre was likely to regard its audience less as a multitude of occasional customers than as an identifiable community linked with the theatre in a relationship of mutual co-operation. The theatre house was likely to be small and economical. Plays would probably not be dropped at the end of a run but kept alive in some sort of repertory schedule.

Thus 'Art Theatre' as a term merges broadly into amateur and little theatre insofar as its limited interest in profits restricted its financial resources for salaries and buildings; into community and local theatre insofar as its membership and audience formed a friendly, often neighbourhood association; and into new, experimental, insurgent and independent theatre insofar as it freely developed its artistic policies away from the norm.

There were at least twenty-six Art Theatres in New York City alone:

American Laboratory Theatre  
Bramhall Playhouse  
Brooklyn Repertory Theatre  
Civic Repertory Theatre  
East and West Players  
Educational Theatre  
Equity Players  
(later Actors' Theatre)

New Theatre  
New York Play Actors  
Pioneer Theatre  
Portmanteau Theatre  
Progressive Stage Society  
Provincetown  
Theatre Guild

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1. The Art Theatre (New York, 1925), pp. 11, 20.

Henderson Players  
Jewish Art Theatre  
Little Theatre  
Negro Players  
Neighborhood Playhouse  
New Playwrights' Theatre

Theatre League  
Theatre Workshop  
Triangle Theatre  
Wage Earners' Theatre  
Washington Square Players  
Yiddish Art Theatre

And the following thirty-six are only some of those which were to be found throughout the United States:

Arts and Crafts Theatre (Detroit)  
Barnstormers of Provincetown  
Carolina Playmakers  
Chicago Little Theatre  
Cleveland Playhouse  
Community Players of Montclair  
Dallas Little Theatre  
Dartmouth Laboratory Theatre  
Drama League Players (Buffalo)

Drama Players of the Chicago  
Theatre Society  
Goodman Memorial Theatre  
Hedgerow Theatre (Philadelphia)  
Hull House Players (Chicago)  
Lake Forest Playhouse (Chicago)  
Little Country Theatre (Fargo)  
Little Playhouse (St. Louis)

Little Theatre (Duluth)  
Little Theatre (Indianapolis)

Little Theatre (Kansas City)  
Little Theatre (Los Angeles)  
Little Theatre (Philadelphia)  
Little Theatre (Rochester)  
Little Theatre (Washington)  
McCallum Theatre (Northampton)  
New Theatre (Chicago)  
Pasadena Playhouse  
Petit Théâtre du Vieux Carré  
(New Orleans)  
Plays and Players (Philadelphia)  
Prairie Playhouse (Galesburg)  
Prince Street Players (Rochester)  
Ram's Head Players (Washington)  
Richmond Hill Players  
Vagabond Players (Provincetown)  
Wisconsin Players  
(Madison and Milwaukee)  
Workshop Theatre (Chicago)  
Workshop Theatre (Yonkers)

These are some of the organizations which merit consideration as Art Theatres. There are many others, like the Morningside Players on the one hand (characterized by non-commercialism, integrated production organization and a modest theatre building but lacking any real commitment to an experimental artistic policy) and, on the other, enterprises such as those of John D. Williams, Arthur Hopkins, Brock Pemberton, George Tyler and Morris Gest which mixed their commitment to the highest artistic standards with commercial considerations.

The very number of Art Theatres is an embarras de richesses to anyone who wishes to investigate the movement in depth. I mean



therefore to devote the greater part of this study to ten representative theatres, all of them in New York City. Before I turn to these theatres themselves, it would be well to present a broad picture of the commercial theatre, to which the Art Theatres set themselves up as an alternative.

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## CHAPTER II

### THE COMMERCIAL THEATRE

The commercial instinct has been found to be so much keener and more correct in its ability to gauge taste than the more artistic judgement and experience of the actor that the former everywhere has been substituted for the latter throughout America.

Letter from A.M. Palmer to Arthur Edwin Krows, in A.E. Krows, Play Production in America (New York, 1916), pp.239-40.



Such change as occurred in American theatre as a whole between about 1860 and 1920 was dominated by increasing centralization and commercialization. One important aspect of the change was that artistic standards were first separated from business interests and then subordinated to them. As this is something insufficiently stressed in the standard histories,<sup>1</sup> and yet important as a background to the Art Theatre (since the Art Theatres set themselves up as an alternative to commercial theatre), I will describe the process briefly.

In the 1860s, the prevalent mode of theatre organization was the stock company. Almost every sizeable town possessed at least one such company with its own house, its relatively permanent and stable acting group and its regularly changing repertoire of plays. But, already, touring professionals claimed a substantial share of the leading parts. Even before the railroad boom the most isolated towns might hope to attract the 'stars' (individual actors with the ability to attract audiences wherever they played). A railroad did not reach Salt Lake City until 1870, but the first touring professionals like Mr. and Mrs. Solden Irwin (1863), E.L. Davenport (1868) and James A. Hearne (1868) arrived soon after the Theatre opened in 1862. Touring stars carried the minimum of personal

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1. The most easily accessible general books for this period are B. Hewitt, Theatre U.S.A.: 1669-1957 (New York, 1959); G. Hughes, A History of the American Theatre: 1700-1950 (New York, 1951); and A.H. Quinn, A History of the American Drama from the Civil War to the Present Day (New York, 1945).

equipment, but their many different costumes and special properties for their large repertoire of roles were often a considerable problem in the stage-coach, however much on stage Richelieu might resemble Macbeth. A 'master' prompt-copy of the scheduled play or plays preceded them to the next company, usually five or six days before the engagement, so that the local supporting cast could have their lines by the time the star's 'agent' arrived, one or two days before the opening. The agent rehearsed basic blocking between regular performances before a final run-through with the star on the Monday morning.

By the late 1860s, New York was already the centre of the theatre world for almost all the stars. (Boston and Philadelphia were surpassed, Chicago's attractions were only beginning and the West had scarcely any theatre centres at all.) Actors and theatre personnel generally gravitated to New York, the star with the chance of returning to tour the country on the 'Road', as it came to be known, with a successful part following a New York run. Stock companies still existed in the city but many were stock only in name. With a growing population (Manhattan had over 500,000 residents by 1850) the run of a play was more often extended for an indefinite period.

New York increased its predominance through the 1870s when the 'combination' system (the touring of star and supporting company together) became common. There were both artistic and commercial reasons why this should have been seen as a logical step at that time. The increasing number of stars on the Road (and foreign fortune-hunters billed as stars) put great pressure upon the local supporting casts and notably lowered artistic standards. The

touring supporting company restored these standards and offered further advantages to audiences outside New York: fresh faces appeared in the plays as well as fresh costumes and, later, fresh scenery.<sup>1</sup> The star benefited in other ways. With his own company supporting, his economic status changed decisively from 'employed' to 'employer'. In the star-stock relationship, the star either took a flat fee or a percentage of box-office receipts. In the new touring company-theatre relationship, the theatre received the fee (i.e. rent) or percentage of takings. The bulk of profits or losses switched from the house to the star. If the risks for the larger touring organization were greater, so too were the rewards for which it played. Commercialization and centralization are clearly features of this development, while the artistic and administrative control of the organization were united firmly in the star.

The change was gradual. The first American combination, conceived by Boucicault in England as early as 1860, left New York in 1863. The first combination to tour with scenery was probably Steele MacKaye's Rose Michel (1875). As the railroads made large-scale transport

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1. See J. Jefferson, The Autobiography of Joseph Jefferson (London, 1890), p.252. The historian Glenn Hughes has suggested that Dion Boucicault pioneered such early organizations to prevent stock companies pirating his copyright. By moving his own company across the country, he could capitalize to a far greater extent on his success by forestalling stock productions. This seems very unlikely. The stars, including Boucicault himself, had been doing this as individuals for many years, making it a most profitable, if exhausting, enterprise. Glenn Hughes's analysis (A History of the American Theatre: 1700-1950 /New York, 1951/, pp.207-8) makes much more sense in terms of the 'duplicate' touring companies; but they must be credited to the ingenuity of Steele MacKaye and did not appear until the 1880s.



possible in the 1860s and 1870s, the companies followed the lines in larger and larger units.

In the 1880s, 'duplicate' companies strengthened New York's claim to be the theatre-centre and cut further into the business of the stock companies. From the city they carried the hit show simultaneously to different parts of the country, with maximum speed and profit for the original production organization, capitalizing on the topicality of the hit and virtually preventing distant stock companies from appropriating the material. The first duplication occurred with Hazel Kirke (1880) again by Steele MacKaye. The itinerary of a duplicate of Elmer Rice's On Trial (1914), for example, booked to cover the West in the 1915-1916 season (at the end of the touring era) shows visits to more than seventy different towns in eight months.<sup>1</sup>

Between 1880 and 1920, the nature of touring underwent a further change. Players booked for New York openings became increasingly less willing to leave their New York contracts for the 'wilderness' of the Road, preferring to be recast for a subsequent run in the city. Fewer of the original players therefore joined the duplicates. The stars too began to concentrate in the city, where potential rewards had risen to a degree which made extensive touring in the mid-nineteenth century way seem unprofitable by comparison. But when artistic standards in the touring companies faded as New York absorbed most of the finest actors, there were hardly any stock companies to

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1. E. Rice, The Living Theatre (New York, 1959), pp.90-91.

return to for healthy competition. By 1900 stock was a rare phenomenon. Hence the situation came about that the cities received almost all theatrical shows direct from New York at the hands of second-rate players.

While commercialization and centralization had increased the status of the star and of New York as a theatre-centre, the process went much further in the city itself. Many stars of the mid-nineteenth century, when not on tour, had managed stable companies in New York: John Brougham his Lyceum, Laura Keane her Varieties, T.S. Hamblin the Bowery Theatre and J.W. Wallack Wallack's Theatre. Here artistic policy and administrative control were still united in the actor-manager. But between 1870 and 1920, the development of the commercial aspects of production ('production' involved selection of the play, provision of financial resources, apportionment of labour and general administrative control during and after preparation) resulted in the separation of the functions of author and producer and the supremacy of the producer over the artist. If we look at some of the influential figures of the period, Augustin Daly, A.M. Palmer, David Belasco and Charles Frohman, we will see this development more clearly.

Augustin Daly founded his Fifth Avenue Theatre in 1869. Historically (with the Duke of Saxe-Meiningen in Germany) he was one of the earliest non-acting producers in the theatre. Daly personally directed his productions. He undertook a number of non-commercial ventures: experiments after 1879 with matinées of revivals and one-act curtain-raisers to his regular production schedule, all by new American dramatists. But his organization indicated aspects of

the trend of centralization and commercialization others were to follow. His affairs were highly centralized: 'he delegated no authority; he supervised personally every phase of the activities of his theatres'.<sup>1</sup> And he operated more than one theatre: in the early 1870s he operated the Grand Opera House; in 1893 he opened Daly's Leicester Square Theatre in London, England.<sup>2</sup> Unlike Daly, A.M. Palmer who produced at the Union Square Theatre from 1872 had no practical theatre experience before he took his job with speculative backing. He never attempted to control the details of artistic policy.<sup>3</sup> He created a centralized, efficient business administration and appointed his artists on the basis of their reputation. In competition with Daly and Palmer there was a third non-acting producer, David Belasco, who began to operate in New York in 1890. Unlike his competitors, Belasco did not immediately base his production organization on a house and relatively stable company. At first he produced on a much more temporary basis, contracting actors and staff for seasons or for runs of particular plays.<sup>4</sup> In this way producers generally were beginning to abandon long-term contracts and, in so doing, secured the commercial advantages of putting actors in competition for parts and salary and avoiding

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1. S. Coad and E. Mims Jr., The Pageant of America: The American Stage (New Haven, 1929), p.236.
  2. See inter alia M. Felheim, The Theatre of Augustin Daly (Cambridge, Mass., 1956).
  3. He was a graduate of New York University Law School and librarian in the New York Mercantile Library. See G. Hughes, A History of the American Theatre: 1700-1950 (New York, 1951), pp.232ff.
  4. See inter alia W. Winter, Life of David Belasco, 2 vols. (New York, 1918).



year round expenses. Charles Frohman also entered the producing field in 1890 and introduced further modifications to the system. By the first year of the twentieth century, the theatres he owned or controlled reached from New York west to San Francisco and east to London. His theatres in New York and London alone were worth over \$5,000,000; he employed over ten thousand staff, to whom he paid over \$35,000,000 a year; his transportation costs amounted to well over one million dollars each year.<sup>1</sup>

Pluralistic stock had given way to an extending monopoly which consolidated in 1896 in the form of a Syndicate centralized in New York, from which individual members hoped to draw collective advantage. The six members were Charles Frohman, Abraham L. Erlanger, Marc Klaw, Al Hayman, Samuel F. Nixon and J. Frederick Zimmerman. Centralization brought to such a pitch had many advantages for the organization of theatres. It brought order, efficiency and stability out of wasteful competition and risk in the touring of the States. Organizations which did not control nation-wide chains of theatres no longer needed to book through different small agencies to create a realistic itinerary. Mistakes of double booking or unnecessary competition with other touring companies in the same small town in the same week were avoided. Central supervision helped enforce contracts, protected the playwright against piracy and protected both production and local theatre managers from breach of contract.

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1. See inter alia I. Marcossion and D. Frohman, Charles Frohman: Manager and Man (London, 1916).

But centralization was far from purely philanthropic in its practice. It gave to commercial exploitation a yet greater efficiency. To book through the Syndicated theatres was almost the only way a company could arrange a national tour, and there is no doubt that the iron sides of monopoly were used to capture and hold business coercively. The Theatrical Syndicate claimed to be an instrument of art: 'the fact that the business of the theatres is conducted on firm lines is calculated to encourage ... everybody ... whose interest in the stage is primarily artistic'.<sup>1</sup> But the broad-based opposition which the practice of the Syndicate aroused revealed that many bona fide artists like David Warfield were thwarted in the pursuit of their work. When Belasco, who owned the largest independent interests outside the Syndicate at that time, wished to book a tour for Warfield in Charles Klein's The Auctioneer (1901), he was unable to secure a routing from the Syndicate for the normal fee of \$300 to \$400, or 20% of expected profits. Erlanger, who disliked co-operating with any of the Syndicate's critics, reportedly said: 'I want half, and if I don't get half out of Warfield you can't have a route for him. I will crush you out; sit upon you, jump upon you and push you out, crush you out of this theatrical business'.<sup>2</sup> Stars were still vitally important components of the theatrical business, but they were no longer free to pursue independent careers, unless of international rank and then only with great difficulty. Stars became one of the raw materials of a theatre world dominated by

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1. Abraham Erlanger, in William Winter, Life of David Belasco (New York, 1918), II, p.158.

2. Ibid, II, p.170.

businessmen. They needed the protection and investment of the producers in a complex environment and became effectively subservient to them. If some stars did not co-operate, the producing organizations could create new stars. In 1908, the scholar and critic William Winter remarked that the theatre had 'passed from the hands of those who ought to control it, the hands either of Actors who love and know their art or of men endowed with the temperament of the Actor and acquainted with his art and its needs, and, almost entirely, it has fallen into the clutches of ... tradesmen'.<sup>1</sup> The monopoly only began to weaken after 1915 with the rise of the rival Shubert organization.

However, though commercialization, centralization and the subordination of the artist to commercial interest may have been natural results of the internal logic of commercial late nineteenth and early twentieth century theatre, their domination of that theatre was brought about the sooner by two things: growing potential profits and economic competition from other sources. The potential profits grew with the expanding market for the theatre. The population in the States increased and spread, almost doubling between 1870 and 1900. The ability to reach this market grew with the railroads and with widespread theatre-building. In such circumstances, commercial interests were more readily

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1. In G. Hughes, A History of the American Theatre: 1700-1950 (New York, 1951), p.318.



attracted. But the realization of profits demanded efficiency, the more as competition in the same market from other sources increased. Minstrel shows were very common at the end of the nineteenth century. They had been popular in a primitive form as early as the 1880s and by 1875 a large number of troupes were on the Road - a number which was to reach its peak twenty years or so later. There were Vaudeville, or variety shows, organized after 1900 through powerful booking agencies, such as Keith and Albee's United Booking Office. While Burlesque, or parody shows, followed the same pattern, Circus reached the heights of popularity in the late 1880s. Again, there was the unique popularity of Uncle Tom's Cabin (1892) so that by 1879 at least fifty companies were on the Road in the northern states, not as duplicate companies but showing their own version of the same theme. By the 1890s there were perhaps four or five hundred such companies, verging on sheer spectacle, with qualities of the Circus and Vaudeville. Competition for audiences came also from the public lecture circuits, Lyceum and Chautauqua, which had developed by the first decade of the twentieth century. The intensity of the competition is revealed in the tone of publicity put out about the varied entertainments. The battle of superlatives, such as 'double mammoth' and 'greatest show on earth', wooed audiences from one entertainment to another.

Direct competition for theatre audiences increased from sources outside live entertainment altogether. The first public movie projection took place at the Cotton States Exposition,

Atlanta, Georgia, in 1895. Its first showing in a theatre occurred the following year as an 'act' in the Vaudeville of Koster and Bial's Music Hall, New York. The silent movie spread rapidly throughout the Vaudeville houses and by 1910 nine thousand houses were devoted primarily to projection. By 1920 there were fifteen thousand houses, some of which seated over one thousand customers, offering entertainment at a most competitive 50 cents. In 1920, Westinghouse began radio broadcasts with coverage of the results of the Harding - Cox presidential election; and by 1925, the first all-electric receiving sets were on the market.

Declining audiences in the 'straight' theatre have also been explained by competition from the automobile, changing public tastes, theatres ill-adapted to changing dramatic forms and disillusionment arising from exaggerated advertising, all of which encouraged the response of commercialization and centralization. But more positive grounds for change lay not with growing competition so much as with the high and rising costs of production, which ran through the industry. For example, while Booth's Theatre, built in 1869 and noted at the time for its extravagance, had cost a little over \$100,000 (including the site), the Ziegfield of 1926 cost more than \$2,000,000. The producer J.J. Shubert estimated increases in detail between 1900 and 1925:

	1900	1925
Interior set	700.00	2,800.00
Scenic artists, per week	25/30.00	100.00+
Stage carpenter, per day	3.00	10.00

	£ 1900	£ 1925
Shop laborers, per day	1.50	8.00
Canvas, per yard	.26	1.85
Lamps, per piece	.06	.35
Rental guarantee	1,500.00	4,500.00
Poster, per sheet	.02	.08
Newspaper advertizing, per line	.12½	1.50
Musicians, per week	25.00	75.00
Conductors, per week	75/100.00	150/300.00

Increases such as these average at about 450%. But they do not describe total production costs, for which figures are not available. Nor is it possible to gauge qualitative variations precisely. In his study of The Business of the Theatre, Alfred Bernheim assesses the absolute increase between 1915 and 1930 as 115 - 150%.<sup>2</sup> Even with this figure however, the rate of increase is up to 30% faster than the general price index in the American economy. Considering roughly the same period (1914-1928), a later analyst, Jack Poggi, accepts a likely increase of 200%.<sup>3</sup>

Other factors, nonetheless real for being less tangible, also added to growing costs. The first of these was the labour system, the second ticket marketing. Organization of workers in the theatre developed with the amalgamation of the Scenic Artists of America with the American Federation of Labour (A.F.L.) in 1918. The Association of Actors and Artists of America joined the A.F.L. in

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1. In A.L. Bernheim, The Business of the Theatre (New York, 1932), p.204.
  2. Ibid.
  3. Theatre in America: The Impact of Economic Forces, 1870-1967 (Ithaca, 1968).



1919. The stage-hands were organized within the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees and Motion Picture Operators, which had developed through the second decade of the century; and in 1926 the playwrights were to define their basic rights in the Dramatists' Guild of the Authors' League of America. As protective organizations, these made every effort in an industry of uncertain employment to obtain for their members substantial wage rates and clearly defined conditions of work. In the case of the stage-hands, the rigorous enforcement of rules, often in circumstances inappropriate, notoriously wasted the producers' money. Frequently many more stage-hands had to be hired than the production demanded. As Morton Eustis puts it, 'the amount of pinochle playing that went on in the basements of Broadway play-houses over a period of years by stagehands who had nothing else to do could never be accurately gauged'.<sup>1</sup>

While the labor system added to the costs of production, the way in which tickets were marketed increased the admission charge to the public and rendered the industry less competitive. Ticket speculators, otherwise known as 'brokers', began to dominate the market by the 1920s. Buying seats from the treasurer of a show in advance, the brokers surcharged the face value of tickets, after withholding sale until demand was strong. Apparently all parties made money. Theatre treasurers received payment from brokers for making advance tickets available to them; the brokers made

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1. B'way Inc! The Theatre as a Business (New York, 1934), p.173.

substantial profits with successful shows and cut their losses with the unsuccessful either by selling beneath face value to the public or to cut-price agencies like LeBlang. The system was perpetuated by all kinds of internal pressures within large commercial interests. But the public purse absorbed all the extra-charging.<sup>1</sup>

Despite the fact that these economic pressures were steadily building inside and outside the industry, demanding greater commercialization to counteract them, the unique economic characteristics of theatre activity served to a great extent to disguise the underlying infirmity. Indeed the industry appeared even to attract more investment. In general terms, far from following the normal pattern of competition within a given commodity area, where the deterrent of superfluous production acts to discourage new producers, in the theatre the 'random' and unequal distribution of rewards assures continued speculation. Each production constitutes a separate business enterprise with a chance of success as great as the next. Each product is unique and separately marketed and in few comparable legitimate industries does investment stand to realize profits of such magnitude so quickly. Thus the potential of high profits still existed in a market where overproduction was the norm. 'Show business, related to Broadway production, became a wild and exciting game .... gambling in individual plays which were bought, incorporated, financed, produced and squeezed dry .... The "swift frenzy of the roulette

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1. Ibid.

wheel, the excitement of poker" dominated the theatrical scene. Times Square was the nation's Monte Carlo.<sup>1</sup> As an example of possible profits, Belasco's The Music Master (1904), by Charles Klein, earned \$171,179.25 in eight weeks.<sup>2</sup> But the number of failures in any season around 1920 had reached 70%.<sup>3</sup> Eustis' assessment is that only 10% of new productions made profits of any size; 10-20% broke even; the rest lost money.<sup>4</sup>

Higher ticket prices alone did not off-set the rising costs of the industry and the increased financial risks. In general tickets rose only half as quickly as costs<sup>5</sup> and movies were not yet a serious source of alternative revenue. Instead, the balance was restored within the industry by cutting all unnecessary costs, taking the maximum profits, increasing organizational efficiency - by commercialization and centralization in other words.

The supremely commercial organizations of about 1920 therefore went into production ad hoc, carrying almost no staff when a production was not on hand. The premises of these organizations were often not in theatres at all, nor even in the 'theatre district'. They were business offices. The 'tradesmen', into whose 'clutches' the artist had fallen, acquired a script from a variety of sources for

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1. Ibid, pp.3-4.
  2. W.Winter, Life of David Belasco (New York, 1918), II, 125.
  3. A.L.Bernheim, The Business of the Theatre: 1750-1932 (New York, 1932), p.208.
  4. M.Eustis, B'way Inc! The Theatres as a Business (New York, 1934).
  5. A.L.Bernheim, The Business of the Theatre: 1750-1932 (New York, 1932), p.214.



which they paid some advance of royalties. The producer then engaged the director, who normally cast the play in consultation with the author. Only after the cast had been engaged would a theatre be booked for opening. Interim space was rented for rehearsals, which would be well under way before the producer contracted technical staff and arranged, through the director, for the hire or manufacture of scenery, costumes and properties. When the full staff had been engaged and the cast rehearsed, the producer then sought to minimize the risk of early failure by taking his show to a neighbouring town prior to the New York opening. It is hard to imagine a system less likely to advance theatrical creativity or the taste of the audience. The Manager A.M. Palmer asserted in a letter to Arthur Edwin Krows, author of a book of instruction and information for inexperienced playwrights, that 'the commercial instinct has been found to be so much keener and more correct in its ability to gauge public taste than the more artistic judgement and experience of the actor that the former everywhere has been substituted for the latter throughout America'.<sup>1</sup>

The subordination of the artist in an organization increasingly commercial naturally had repercussions in the art of the theatre itself. Whereas the period 1860 to 1920 witnessed substantial achievements in the media of painting, the novel and music in the United States, drama and theatre remained, in the eyes of the public,

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1. A.E. Krows, Play Production in America (New York, 1916), pp.239-40.

art forms of inferior status, if indeed they were respected as art forms at all. In 1875, Henry James could see no 'very intimate relation between the stage as it stands in this country and the general course of American civilization'.<sup>1</sup> The critic Joseph Wood Krutch characterized the playwright of the period as thinking of himself 'not as an artist but as an artisan'.<sup>2</sup> And in 1924, the teacher and critic Clayton Hamilton noticed the still prevalent attitude that the production of drama was not among the fine arts:

When a symphony of Beethoven's is played, or an opera of Wagner's is produced, the musical reviewers do not try to make jokes about Beethoven's deafness or Wagner's whiskers. Our newspapers do not make fun of Rembrandt or Michelangelo. Yet the same publications that are serious in their discussions of painting and sculpture and music are merely flippant in their discussion of drama.<sup>3</sup>

Indigenous American painters, authors and composers in their own ways, or in ways imitative of European examples, produced works to command the respect of American critics. For example the painter Samuel Colman (An Emigrant Train Fording Medicine Bow Creek, Rocky Mountains, 1870) and Winslow Homer (Ouananiche Fishing, Lake St. John, 1897) drew on European Realism and made it American by linking it to peculiarly Romantic native landscape, while George Bellows painted imitative Impressionist work of fine quality such as Upper Broadway

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1. In J. Moses and J.M. Brown, eds. The American Theatre as Seen by Its Critics: 1752-1934 (New York, 1934), p.125.
  2. The American Drama Since 1918 (London, 1957), p.13.
  3. Conversations on Contemporary Drama (New York, 1924), p.184.

(1910). Then Mark Twain produced the uniquely American The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1884),<sup>1</sup> while authors like William Dean Howells (A Hazard of New Fortunes, 1889)<sup>2</sup> and Theodore Dreiser (Sister Carrie, 1900)<sup>3</sup> wrote in the European Realist tradition. American music was almost wholly imitative in character save for the virtually unperformed, highly radical masterpieces of Charles Ives; but the conservatoire oratorios of Horatio Parker and the Grieg-derived tone-pictures of Edward Macdowell were at least thoroughly workmanlike.<sup>4</sup> Drama alone showed no achievements at all to speak of, indigenous or imitative.

But then, with the exception of the largely unknown work of Buchner, drama as an art form vis-à-vis painting, the novel and music was at this time in eclipse in Europe also, at least until the later nineteenth century. The Well-Made Play - the dominant dramatic form of the age - was thoroughly conventional. August Strindberg wrote interestingly (and probably with some exaggeration) that

the play had to have five acts, each act had to run to about twenty-four sheets of writing paper; thus the whole play to 5 x 24 = 120 foolscap pages. Changes of scene within the acts were not liked and were considered a weakness. Each act had to have a beginning, a middle and an end. The curtain lines had to give rise to applause through oratorical figures; if the play was in unrhymed verse, the last two lines had to rhyme. In the play there had to be 'turns' for

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1. New York.
  2. New York.
  3. New York.
  4. See for example R.W. Emerson, 'Literary Ethics', Works (London, 1866), II, 206.



the actors which were called 'scenes'; the monologue was permissible and often constituted a highlight; a longish emotional outburst or invective, a revelation, were almost compulsory; there also had to be narrative passages - a dream, an anecdote, an event. 1

But in Europe the very imperviousness of the convention made for radicalism without. Zola's essay Le Naturalisme au Théâtre (1881) was one of the earliest influential demands for basic reform and 'a totally new start':

Zola derided the depiction of characters on stage as symbols of 'virtue and vice', undetermined either by their 'environment' or by 'the logic of their own disposition'. Like Strindberg, he deplored conventions of 'declamation' and 'majestic speech' and wished that playwrights would abandon 'contrived formulas' and 'tricks of the trade' 'which manipulated unbelievable stories' and 'romantic incidents'. He was waiting until the development of naturalism, already achieved in the novel takes over the stage, until the playwrights return to the source of science and modern arts, to the study of nature, to the anatomy of man, to the painting of life in an exact reproduction more original and powerful than anyone has so far dared to risk on the boards .... The two formulae are before us: the naturalistic formula which makes the stage a study and picture of real life; and the conventional formula which makes the stage an amusement of the mind, an intellectual guessing game, an art of adjustment, a symmetry regulated after a certain code.2

Already in 1877, Ibsen had begun what was to become a series of Naturalistic plays, bringing the democratic elements of Zola's demands to some of the structural techniques of the later nineteenth century French drama, surpassing Zola's own Thérèse Raquin (1873). The Naturalistic mode was developed subsequently

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1. In M. Esslin, 'Naturalism in Context', Drama Review (Winter, 1968).
  2. In T. Cole, ed., Playwrights on Playwriting (London, 1960), pp.5-14.

throughout Europe by such authors as Strindberg (Father [1887]; Miss Julie [1888]), Hauptmann (Before Sunrise [1889]) and Chekhov (The Seagull [1896]).

The American stage was responsive to European example, almost to the point of dependence, but failed to respond immediately to the Naturalistic revolution in theatre or even to make a significant national contribution to the still dominant Pre-Naturalistic mode. The producer Augustin Daly for example, active in New York from 1869, acquired German plays (usually farces) as Wallack acquired English material, at a time when international copyright was informally arranged. Such plays cost less than American plays, had the advantage of a try-out and supplied a traditional demand for contact with the Old World. At the end of this period, the producer Lee Shubert still preferred to acquire his scripts in the same way, particularly when a play had already appeared in French, German and English versions: 'that way you get three great writers working on it before you even start and it doesn't cost you a cent'.<sup>1</sup> Of the one hundred and sixty-six new plays of 1902, only forty-eight were solely by American authors and twenty-two of these dealt with foreign themes.<sup>2</sup>

If one can generalize, the characteristics of European Pre-Naturalistic drama which Strindberg and Zola had criticized

1. J. Stagg, The Brothers Shubert (New York, 1969), p.135.
2. W. Archer, 'The New Drama and the New Theatre', McClure's Magazine (November, 1909).

provided the conventional principles for American playwrights throughout the period, from farce to melodrama. Bronson Howard, perhaps America's first 'professional' playwright, described the central principle as that of obeying the rules of 'dramatic truth'. Dramatic truth was not 'objective truth', but rather the means by which the 'prejudices' of a contemporary audience might be satisfied.<sup>1</sup> The rules demanded a recognizable moral of dignity, a theme of general appeal, strong curtain situations, a strong central climax, morally inoffensive language and situation, 'satisfactory' or happy resolution of situation, strongly drawn characters and awareness of a host of axioms concerning 'acceptable' behaviour of characters. An example of the application of these principles was one of the most successful plays of the period: Augustin Daly's melodrama Under the Gaslight (1867). The theme is of love in the face of hardship. Laura Courtland is at first engaged to the wealthy Ray Trafford but is rejected because of her social situation. Leaving her home in despair, she is sought by the contrite Ray and her disreputable father, Byke. Byke and his companion, Judas, capture her with a variety of wicked intentions at the end of the third act but Ray rescues her. He conceals her but discovers that his love now belongs to Laura's supposed cousin Pearl (really a daughter of Judas) and is encouraged by the generous Laura. Byke, however, is still in pursuit and Laura flees. She is warned by one Snorkey, a go-between, of the pursuit before

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1. The Autobiography of a Play (New York, 1914), pp.26-27. See also J.W.Krutch, American Drama Since 1918 (London, 1957), p.13.



Snorkey himself is captured and tied to a railway track. Laura rescues Snorkey just before the train rushes past at the climax of the fourth act. In the final act Ray and Laura are reconciled and married, while Byke and Judas receive the just desserts of their villany.<sup>1</sup> The mistaken identity, the chase, the go-between, the 'asides' were typically within the convention of the melodrama. The play was revived every year until the 1880s. Indeed the railway device was so popular that Daly spent a good deal of his time in court to keep it out of competitors' theatres. The producers looked to apply the same conventions to revivals of classical plays as well as to contemporary works. They often produced texts of Shakespeare for example, substantially rearranged. They generally condensed the plays, removed all 'indecent' expressions, but all language describing scenery which could as easily be described by the scene-painter and left out all passages which did not contribute to character or dramatic movement. They might switch speeches about for various reasons, perhaps to give better lines to featured actors.<sup>2</sup>

Standardization of plays within a conventional framework, and the persistence of convention, owed much to the commercialization and centralization of the theatre as an organization. The very

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1. M. Felheim, The Theatre of Augustin Daly (Cambridge, Mass., 1956),
  2. See for example ibid, pp.219ff. pp.50ff.

fact that plays were toured throughout the States, to communities of quite different environments and cultural experience, demanded subjects and treatments of universal appeal. (The movie passed through a similar experience when the theatre was ceasing to cater for the 'vulgar majority'.) Winthrop Ames, a pioneer of the Art Theatre, sardonically described the 'foremost manager' of the commercial theatre as 'he who puts out the largest number of "productions" within a given time and who so chooses and shapes them that they may please the average audience from Portland in Maine to Portland in Oregon, and for two or three seasons'.<sup>1</sup> The concentration of control in fewer hands made the process of standardization easier. The commercialization of success also involved re-creation of a success in similar guise. The critic John Corbin observed that 'the manager finds what the public wants and very naturally tries to supply that demand. In the dramatic world, the same law of human nature holds as in the oil fields of Pennsylvania. Let a man sink a well and strike a gusher and all his neighbors will promptly sink wells in the hope of striking the same vein'.<sup>2</sup>

During the period, active response to European Naturalism was generally unfavourable. Augustin Daly saw Zola's L'Assomoir in Paris in 1879. It was, he thought,

a disgusting piece - one prolonged sigh from first to last over the miseries of the poor, with a dialogue culled from

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1. 'Only Three Plays out of Two Thousand', N.Y. Times, December 19, 1909.
  2. Boston Transcript, September 22, 1911.

the lowest slang and tritest clap-trap.... The only novelty in it was the 'lavoir' scene, where two washer-women (the heroine and her rival) throw pails of warm water over each other and stand dripping before the audience.<sup>1</sup>

When he produced the play for this 'novelty' in New York in the same year, it was not a success either with the public or the critics. William Winter, an influential critic in the late nineteenth century, noted in 1883 that Ibsen's A Doll's House 'does not possess the intricacy or rapidity of action which best pleases the average American audience'.<sup>2</sup> In 1913 he deplored such influence as there was of Ibsen and Shaw:

Why inflict the stage with enquiry as to 'original sin', or the consequence of ancestral wickedness, or the moral obliquity resultant from heredity disease, or the various forms of corruption incident to vice and crime? Since when did the theatre become a proper place for a chamber of horrors and the vivisection of moral ailments?<sup>3</sup>

The influence of European Naturalism on American playwriting was gradual, not immediate, considerably less advanced by 1920 than in the comparable field of the American novel. Howells himself, who so developed Naturalistic writing in America by discussion and example in the novel, could only contribute farces or comedies to the drama. He first collaborated as an adaptor of German farces for Augustin Daly. His later works, in the 1890s, did employ an awareness of social manners, but they were in no way explorations of social milieu.

James A. Hearne created a fuller characterization in

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1. M. Felheim, The Theatre of Augustin Daly (Cambridge, Mass., 1956), p.181.
  2. In M.J. Moses and J.H. Brown, eds., The American Theatre and Its Critics: 1752-1934 (New York, 1934), p.103.
  3. Ibid, p.95.



Margaret Fleming (1890). There is illness, suicide, a lover, a baby, a letter, but through the typical devices of melodrama Hearne, like Ibsen or Chekhov, brings out a character of human proportions; a character who, in the original version, leaves her husband at the end without forgiveness. There is more character 'revelation' through less obtrusive signs or actions, more naturalness in the writing of dialogue so that 'it forced a comparison with life',<sup>1</sup> from the critics. Similarly, in The Faith Healer (1909), William Vaughan Moody conceived the idea of the conflict within a man between his love and his work. Like Philip Morrow in Edward Sheldon's The Nigger (1909) he must resolve the tensions centred within him to restore his self-respect. In these instances, character was liberated from the strictures of melodramatic situation and, in its exploration and development, was capable of absorbing the focus of dramatic attention for its own intrinsic value.

But these sporadic moves in the direction of Naturalism did not disturb the prevailing 'Romantic', Pre-Naturalistic drama which the commercial theatre continued to produce. Hearne's greatest success was the sentimental Shore Acres (1892); Clyde Fitch's historical romances achieved more success than his social comedies; and Sheldon's Romance (1913), which describes the passion of an American clergyman for an Italian opera singer, was conspicuously more successful than either The Nigger (1909) or his other plays

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1. H. Garland, Arena (October, 1891).

of more serious social comment. After 1900, there was a peculiarly strong demand for 'crook' melodramas such as Leah Kleschna (1904) by C.M.S. McLellan, and The Bad Man (1920) by Porter E. Browne. A new, spectacular entertainment, the 'musical comedy', had developed out of the nineteenth century elements of spectacular, pantomime and operetta. The element of spectacle increasingly coloured the drama as well. In a competitive, commercial atmosphere, in which the definition of 'quality' was uncertain, advertising tended to demand spectacular features to sustain ever more extravagant publicity claims. Belasco's Ben Hur (1899) was of this type. It was celebrated for its one hundred and twenty thousand square feet of scenery, its over fifty stage hands, its live camel and its chariot-race with live horses on treadmills.<sup>1</sup> In the local competition for audiences, American drama tended to approximate the qualities offered by its competitors.

It is perhaps not surprising, then, that for a great number of critics, producers, playwrights and other artists of the theatre, the development of theatre organization and the related condition of the drama between 1860 and 1920 were a source of concern. By 1920 criticism had become widespread and, in some cases, acrimonious. The harsh tone that such criticism sometimes took was largely the result of the apparent inability of the American theatre to initiate

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1. See B. Hewitt, Theatre U.S.A: 1668-1959 (New York, 1959), pp.273-79.

creative change from within itself and of the widening gulf between American and European achievements.

Though the theatre in general is naturally slow to change (because of its complex organization, its need to ensure clear understanding between contributors of widely different skills for a coherent production, its sheer expense and its need to stay within the comprehension of its audience), the theatre in Europe, for reasons specific to different countries, had by 1920 assimilated artistic changes to an extent which America had not. There were two main reasons accounting for developments in Germany. Long-term subsidy or subscription systems enabled both municipal theatres (like the Charlottenburg Theatre) and Volkstheatres (like the Worms Theatre) to develop broad artistic policies. These institutions were fundamentally influential in the national theatre. And director-managers of great ability emerged to utilize such facilities for experiment: they included Otto Brahm and Max Reinhardt. When the critic Huntly Carter visited several towns before 1912, he reported the general presence of experimentation - 'to a greater or lesser extent in nearly all the theatres and productions'.<sup>1</sup> In Great Britain conditions were not as favourable to change as those of Germany, but artistic control did at least remain with the artists of the theatre to a greater extent than in America. British managers were normally not primarily businessmen and producers like Harley Granville-Barker and Gertrude Kingston

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1. The New Spirit in the Drama and Art (London, 1912), p.68.



were not discouraged from experimental work. Different to American conditions again, an important aspect of British theatrical organization continued to be the repertory theatre. From this environment sprang such influential professional experimental groups outside 'Shaftesbury Avenue' as the Gaiety (Manchester), the Liverpool Repertory, the Pilgrim Players (Birmingham), the Abbey Players (Dublin), and the Scottish Playgoers Limited (Glasgow). The Independent Theatre (1891) and the Stage Society (1899) adopted the German subscription system to secure freedom from commercial pressures. Artistic reform in France, on the other hand, was almost exclusively the result of pressure from groups of the kind which had played only a part in the developments of German and British theatre art: the radically experimental groups which functioned outside the commercial organization. Such theatres were the Théâtre Libre (1887) of André Antoine and the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre (1893) of V. Lugné Poë. Although the small experimental groups themselves did not develop into permanent organizations within the commercial system, their work was soon imitated by the theatres whose work they had deplored. In Russia the same pattern emerged, although the reform of commercial theatre was never so sudden. The wealthy Constantin Stanislavsky and Vladimir Nemirovitch-Dantchenko founded the Moscow Art Theatre in 1897, an organization of experimental character and eventual international reputation, which not only influenced commercial theatre in Russia but became a stable centre of old European experimental theatre arts from which other groups developed or drew inspiration.

The conditions which permitted or encouraged change in the

European theatre were not present in America. Artistic control had passed further from the hands of the artist, there was no strong repertory tradition, there was no tradition of subsidy or subscription and audiences were perhaps less adventurous in their tastes. The tension therefore within the American theatre, intensified by the interest of many Americans in European developments, which by 1920 extended beyond Naturalism into Symbolism and Expressionism, engendered greater frustration and even bitterness the further America moved into the twentieth century.

Harrison Grey Fiske, editor of the New York Dramatic Mirror, abused the Syndicate as 'an un-American and intolerable combination of greedy, narrow-minded tricksters'.<sup>1</sup> William Winter, not indispensed to experiment per se, arraigned the commercial power of the Syndicate as a Jewish conspiracy.<sup>2</sup> Of Charles Frohman, the playwright J.M. Barrie wrote that 'he knew more about the theatre and less about plays than any man I know'.<sup>3</sup> A growing body of critics found the condition of the drama as disturbing as they found the theatre commercial. Clayton Hamilton dismissed American playwrights thus:

[They] speak, yet say nothing. They represent facts, but fail to reveal truths. What they lack is purpose. They collect instead of meditating; they invent instead of wondering; they are clever instead of being real. They are averse of details; they regard the part as greater than

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1. In W. Winter, Life of David Belasco (New York, 1918), II, 175.
  2. Ibid, p.168.
  3. S. Coad and E. Mims Jr., The Pageant of America: The American Stage (New Haven, 1929), p.279.



the whole. They deal with outsides and with surfaces, not with centralities and profundities. They value acts more than they value the meaning of acts; they forget that it is in the motive rather than in the deed that life is to be looked for.<sup>1</sup>

But Winthrop Ames and the founders of the New Theatre noted in 1909 that it was 'difficult to get a hearing for plays of novelty and originality'.<sup>2</sup> Susan Glaspell, soon to become a playwright of note, felt that after seeing most plays, 'your mind came out where it went in, only tired'.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, Lawrence Langner, beginning a distinguished producing career, adjudged

With but a few exceptions, the Broadway plays were meretricious and cheap. The best plays were importations ... Musical shows abounded and one was told that the purpose of the theatre was to entertain the tired businessman, who seemed to be very tired indeed.<sup>4</sup>

Finally, there was tension in the realm of acting. Commercialization and centralization had substituted the star for the stock company, and the stars had become the property of the producers. Their importance to the success (or failure) of a play was generally accepted: 'Give me a pretty girl with a smile, an actor with charm, and I will defy our old friend Aristotle' was Charles Frohman's maxim.<sup>5</sup> Without the leading actor the play

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1. In M.J. Moses and J.M. Brown, eds., The American Theatre as Seen by Its Critics: 1752-1934 (New York, 1934), p.192-93.
  2. 'Aims and Purposes', Leaflet /1909/.NYPL.TC.
  3. The Road to the Temple (New York, 1927), p.248.
  4. The Magic Curtain (New York, 1952), p.79.
  5. In I. Marcossion and D. Frohman, Charles Frohman: Manager and Man (London, 1916), p.323.



lost most of its power: 'When one of my stars finishes with a play, that play goes permanently on the shelf, no one ever hoping to muster together an audience for it without the original actor in the star part'.<sup>1</sup> The lack of permanent stock companies and the centralization of the ad hoc casting system in New York strengthened the system of casting to type. Producers could draw on a wide pool of unemployed actors without commitment to a small company. The versatility of the actor was no longer so important. Although the style of acting, the 'heroic' vein, with its dignity, meticulous diction, heightened gesture and emotion and conventional focus upon the centrally positioned star, a style familiar to Lawrence Barrett, E. H. Sothern and Otis Skinner for example, had given way to a more balanced and restrained technique between 1860 and 1920, the style was still star-oriented. In Europe, however, considerably more progress had been made towards balance, or ensemble, and restraint, or Naturalism, and to developing the quality of versatility. At the Théâtre Libre, André Antoine managed a company which did not seek to 'score points' with the audience, submitted to total involvement with character, concentrated on ensemble effects and attempted to ignore the audience completely in the pursuit of Naturalism. At the Moscow Art Theatre (1897), Constantin Stanislavsky raised Antoine's experimental beginnings to a higher level of theoretical and practical sophistication and a much wider influence.

Criticisms made by Europeans of American acting showed something

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1. Ibid, p.298.

of the extent to which standards diverged. When George Bernard Shaw saw Daly's company in London, he had nothing but contempt for the unrealistic acting. He regarded it as excessively rhetorical, full of posing and opposed to common sense in its interpretation of character.<sup>1</sup> When the actress Eva Le Gallienne arrived in New York shortly after the outbreak of the First World War and began to introduce the Naturalism basic to her European experience, she disturbed the director who would say: '"No, no! Not that way! Do it this way! Put more pep into it. Give it a punch!"'<sup>2</sup> Some American critics also expressed concern with the general condition of local acting. They regretted the superiority of the star to the play, a system which preferred 'personalities to art'. They proposed that the play should 'centre in the general ensemble rather than in one personality'.<sup>3</sup> The writer John Ranken Towse argued that since the virtual disappearance of stock companies, 'the supply of capable young American actors and actresses has almost entirely ceased'.<sup>4</sup> Type-casting denied the actor 'both instruction and opportunity and therefore as a general thing the stage is filled with mere mummers who cannot act even tolerably well'.<sup>5</sup>

The relationship between theatrical decors in Europe and in

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1. Dramatic Opinions and Essays (London, 1911), I, 169.
  2. In E. Le Gallienne, At 33 (New York, 1934), pp.117-18.
  3. J. Corbin, 'Only Three Plays out of Two Thousand', N.Y. Times, December 19, 1909.
  4. 'An American School of Dramatic Art', Century Magazine (June, 1898), p.261.
  5. J. Speed, 'A Week in New York Theatres', Forum (March, 1895), p.127.

the United States in the late nineteenth century was rather more complicated. In Europe, Naturalistic settings were designed in parallel with the movements in drama and acting. Duke George of Saxe-Meiningen, André Antoine and Constantin Stanislavsky were foremost contributors to a theatre generally which, by 1920, had largely abandoned footlights and their upward shadows, was using interior box settings of sturdy character, real properties, overhead electric lighting, unslanted stage floors and carefully researched overall creations of period and place. And still further developments saw attention given to suggestive or symbolic designs in the work of Adolph Appia and Edward Gordon Craig,<sup>1</sup> where light, shapes, colours and textures could be used to create a new range of environments for the actor and playwright. In America, there were producers like David Belasco who kept pace with many technical changes and even pioneered them. Belasco's overhead lighting system through gelatins was at least as advanced as any to be found in Germany. But Belasco's achievements in lighting were exceptional. The debate about the need for footlights continued, and a large proportion of New York theatres were not equipped with balcony spotlights (standard with Belasco since 1907) until the later 1920s. He also used all manner of contrivances to achieve illusions of reality, from a snowstorm in his The Girl of the Golden West (1905) to real pine needles on the stage floor

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1. A. Appia, La Mise en Scène du Drame Wagnérien (Paris, 1895); and E.G. Craig, On the Art of the Theatre (Edinburgh, 1905), etc.



in his Tiger Rose (1917). But Belascoism was never true to the spirit of European Naturalism. Like many other American producers whose settings provided backgrounds for Romantic drama and acting, he often coloured his stage effects with spectacle. (The designer and historian Mordecai Gorelik has described the technique as 'American Romantic Naturalism'.)<sup>1</sup> Designs of suggestion and symbolism were rarely seen. Many techniques of the Romantic repertoire were still at the designers' command up to and after 1920. These included cutting doors and windows into canvas, properties painted on walls, false perspectives, the use of wings to represent a room, green velvet hedges and painted gauzes. Special effects included the thunder of iron plates and copper sheets, rain from overhead pipes and explosions from spring boards.<sup>2</sup>

There were many for whom changes in scene design were as absolutely important as changes in the organization of the theatre, its drama and acting. The actor Richard Mansfield for example wrote: 'the extravagance of the stage today is alarming. It is not only alarming, it is the ruin of the pure drama.'<sup>3</sup> The critic Walter Pritchard Eaton asked 'why not be frankly symbolic and be

1. New Theatres for Old (London, 1947), p.476.

2. See A. Krows, Equipment for Stage Production (New York, 1928), pp.31 ff.

3. 'Concerning Acting', North American Review (September, 1894), p.337.

done with it? Why not devise scenery which shall suggest rather than attempt to reproduce?'<sup>1</sup>

The tensions and the underlying frustrations of critics, writers, actors, directors and designers, deriving from desires for change deprived of reasonable hope of fulfilment, intensified after 1900. After 1909 they were to express themselves in ways other than impotent criticism and sporadic attempts to reform the traditional theatre from within. They were to follow the pattern already created by the handful of European artists in such groups as the Théâtre Libre and Moscow Art Theatre and to make 'a totally new start' outside the commercial theatre. Their theatres were the Art Theatres with which this study is concerned.

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1. American Magazine (July, 1911), p.308. And see for example P. Fitzgerald, 'What Is the Stage?', Living Age (October 23, 1897), p.337; and W.P. Eaton, 'The Man of Letters and the New Man of the Theatre', Century Magazine (December, 1913), p.287.

## CHAPTER III

### TEN ART THEATRES

These playhouses seemed clearly the forerunners of an American art theatre.

Sheldon Cheney, The Art Theatre  
(New York, 1925), p.5.



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As I said at the end of Chapter I, I mean to devote the greater part of this study of the Art Theatres to ten representative organizations. They are the

American Laboratory Theatre  
Civic Repertory Theatre  
Jewish Art Theatre  
Little Theatre  
Neighborhood Playhouse

New Playwrights' Theatre  
New Theatre  
Provincetown  
Theatre Guild  
Washington Square Players

A number of factors influenced my selection of these theatres as in some way representing the Art Theatre movement as a whole. I found it necessary to make a selection in the first place because an in depth study of every theatre in the movement would have been a monumental task. Then the records of many of the theatres are seemingly lost and many more are widely scattered throughout the United States. To make a broad, superficial study would have been equally unsatisfactory because, like the surveys of Kenneth Macgowan and Clarence Perry, it could only be a rather crude compendium of data.<sup>1</sup> Although I examined the records of a wide variety of Art Theatres in several different places, I discovered that the theatres of New York City, with its proportionately heavy concentration of organizations of different types, would present a sufficiently representative and somewhat neater framework to any study of the Art Theatre movement and that these theatres would also give a full account because in the main their records are better preserved and

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1. Viz. K. Macgowan, *Footlights Across America* (New York, 1929); and C. Perry, *The Work of the Little Theatres* (New York, 1933).

more accessible. Further, I found that ten such theatres are sufficient to illustrate the most important facets of Art Theatre ideology (as I have defined it in my first chapter)<sup>1</sup> and to exemplify its evolution. Thus while each theatre is indisputably an Art Theatre, 'non-commercialism' was perhaps particularly central to the experience of the Provincetown for example, 'co-operative organization' to the Jewish Art Theatre, 'co-operative audiences' to the New Theatre and the Theatre Guild, 'intimacy' to the American Laboratory Theatre and the Little Theatre, 'repertory' to the Neighborhood Playhouse and 'experiment' to the New Playwrights' Theatre and the Washington Square Players. Lastly, the chronological range of the ten theatres represents a broad time span.

Here I shall introduce each organization briefly, illustrating its theatre, its location and its founding 'manifesto'.

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1. See above, Chapter I, pp.7-8.

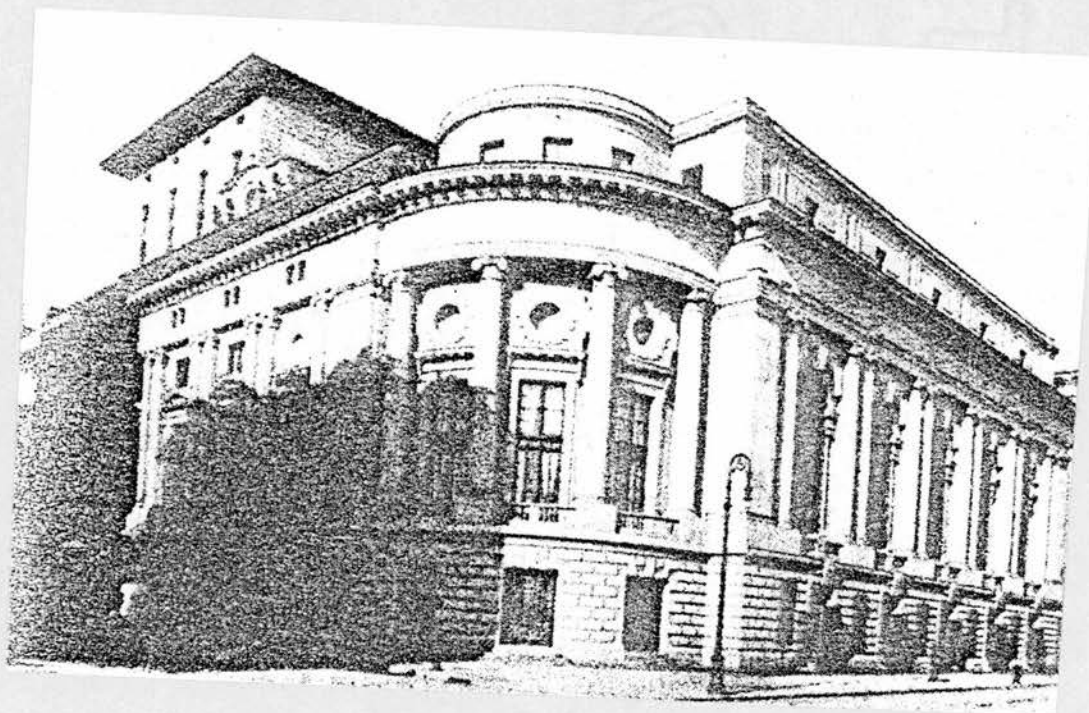


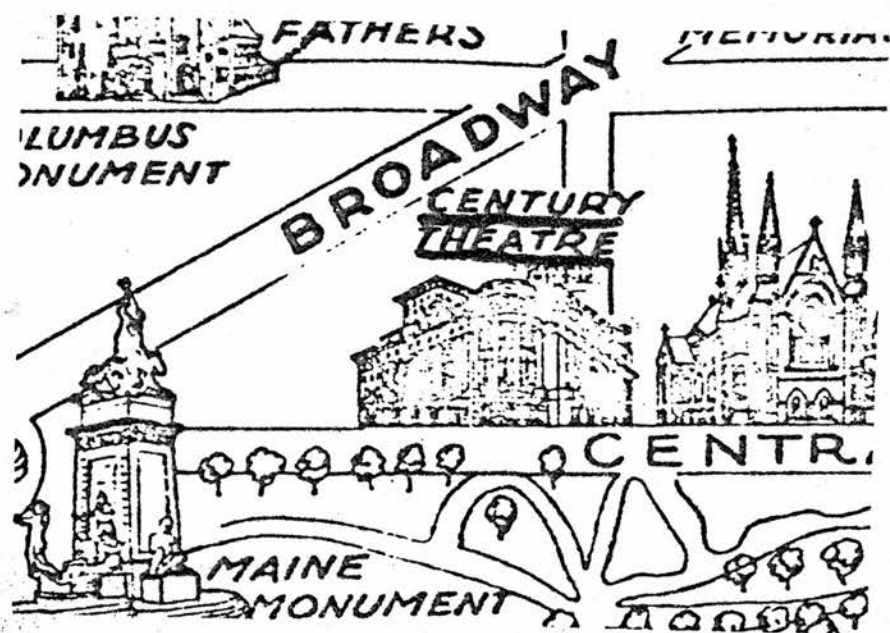
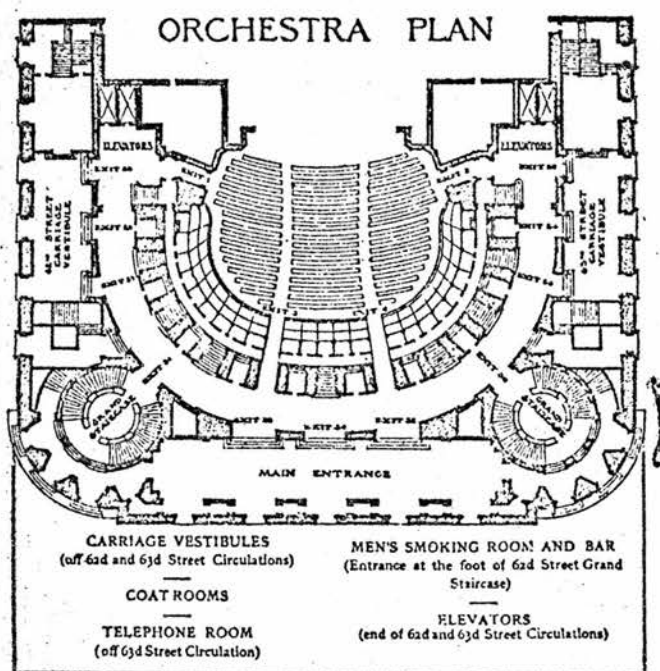
## I THE NEW THEATRE (1909-1911)

The New Theatre operated for only two seasons after its opening performance in 1909. The first illustration shows the impressa with which the organization ornamented publicity materials: it is from a programme of January, 1910.<sup>1</sup> With its dramatic masks and Shakespearian motto, it represented the classical quality which the New Theatre looked for in its artistic policies. There follows an illustration of the façade of the theatre,<sup>2</sup> a building sufficiently impressive to be of interest to visitors to New York and to New Yorkers themselves. It has now (unfortunately) been replaced by the Century Apartments. Only the Orchestra Plan of the four auditorium levels appears here, but this is indicative of the scale and elaboration of the theatre, which accommodated one thousand six hundred seats.<sup>3</sup> The situation was Central Park West, stretching the full block between 62nd and 63rd Streets.<sup>4</sup> The theatre joined other buildings of imposing dignity which faced across Central Park to the celebrated Fifth Avenue residences.

In such manifestos as the following,<sup>5</sup> which appeared in 1908, the New Theatre emphasised a mixed policy aiming at non-commercialism, meritorious plays, repertory and subscription

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1. Programme of Twelfth Night, January 26, 1910. Author's collection.
  2. Photograph courtesy of John Jennings, Author's collection.
  3. Programme of Twelfth Night, January 26, 1910. Author's collection.
  4. Enlarged detail of Pictorial Map of New York City (New York, 1928), Harvard Map Collection.
  5. 'The New Theatre'. Clipping [1908]. H.TC.







audiences:

Dear Sir:

The undersigned believe that there is in this City an urgent call for the establishment of a Theatre, devoted to the cause of Art only, and not in any way to the cause of profit; in which the classical repertoire as well as modern plays of genuine merit shall be performed by a Stock Company, in a manner worthy of the best traditions of the stage; which shall occupy towards the Dramatic Art and Literature of this country a place similar to that held by the 'Theatre Francais' in France; and the mission of which shall be to foster and stimulate Art, and to exercise that refining and elevating influence which makes the stage, if properly conducted, an educational agency second to none in effectiveness.

The founders also believe that New York should have a house for the proper presentation of the many delightful light operas of acknowledged merit - the kind of operas to the performance of which the Opera Comique in Paris is dedicated, and the production of which, in the Metropolitan House, is made impossible by the large size of that auditorium. These operatic performances will not be in competition with, but supplementary to the Grand Opera, and in order to emphasize the desire not to enter into rivalry with the Metropolitan Opera House, it is proposed to give Opera Comique performances only on the nights when there are no subscription performances of Grand Opera.

....Work has been begun on a building of great beauty and dignity of design which promises to be in every way a model Theatre combining every device for the comfort and safety of the public, with an auditorium carefully adapted, as to size and acoustics, to the proper presentation of light opera, drama, and comedy. The sum of \$250,000 in cash will be provided by the founders in return for capital stock, dividends upon which are to be restricted to 5% per annum; to a limited number of persons the opportunity was offered to become purchasers of boxes, to be called 'Owners' Boxes', at the price of \$25,000 each; the purchasers of 'Owners' Boxes', in return for such payment, to be entitled to a box for Tuesdays (Opera Comique) and Thursdays (Drama, Comedy, etc.). These evenings will be designated as 'Owners' Nights', and will doubtless become special nights in the same sense in which in the French Government Theatres certain evenings have become distinguished as 'Soirées des Abonnés'. All of the 'Owners' Boxes' having already been disposed of or applied for, the wish has been expressed in many quarters that orchestra stalls, balcony seats, for 'Owners' Nights' be likewise offered for sale outright ....

The season as planned will be of thirty weeks duration,

beginning on October 1 of each year. There will of course be from the start frequent changes of repertoire, and after a few seasons the management expects to be in a position to produce a different play, or opera comique, each evening.

.... if the Theatre attains the rank and success which it will certainly be the founder's earnest endeavor to ensure for it, it is not unreasonable to expect that "owners' seats" will experience a gradually increasing appreciation in value, as has been the case in the Metropolitan Opera House, where the sum originally paid to become a box holder amounted to \$30,000, whilst three times that amount is now bid for the privilege.

The founders have assured themselves by careful estimates from the most competent quarters that a theatre run on the proposed lines will easily be self-sustaining and probably profitable. Any net profits - beyond a reasonable rate of interest on the stock (not exceeding 5%) and a yearly sinking fund for the Mortgage (if any) will be devoted to the creation of an endowment fund for the Theatre, a pension fund for the actors, a school of dramatic art, and similar use in keeping with the altruistic purpose of the enterprise.

Very truly yours,

The founders of the New Theatre were primarily men of extreme wealth, businessmen with an interest in theatrical arts, many of them already actively supporting the Metropolitan Opera House. Its manager was Winthrop Ames. His grandfather, Oakes Ames (1804-1873), of Massachusetts, had been President of the Union Pacific, a member of Congress and owner of a tool company valued at several million dollars in its best years. Winthrop, inheriting extensive private wealth, could be described as a 'Boston Brahmin',



a sensitive, serious-minded intellectual with a reputation for exquisite taste. He had managed the Castle Square Stock Company in Boston and had travelled through Europe to study theatre architecture before settling in New York.<sup>1</sup>

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1. See Appendix A for biographical sketches of Ames and other prominent figures in the Art Theatre movement.



## II THE LITTLE THEATRE (1912-1917)

The Little Theatre opened in 1912 and produced plays in a desultory fashion under its founder's management until 1917. There was a clear break in production between 1915 and 1916. Like Eva Le Gallienne with the Civic Repertory, the founder, Winthrop Ames, was unable to give the enterprise the title he preferred since another New York producer, William Brady, had pre-empted 'the Playhouse'. Ames never adopted any significant emblem: the one illustrated here is taken from a programme in my own collection for the season 1914-1915.<sup>1</sup> The Little Theatre still stands at 240, West 44th. Street, outwardly little changed from its early days as illustrated below, although there are now no such pleasant window boxes, and a large air-conditioning unit hangs in place of the fan-light.<sup>2</sup>

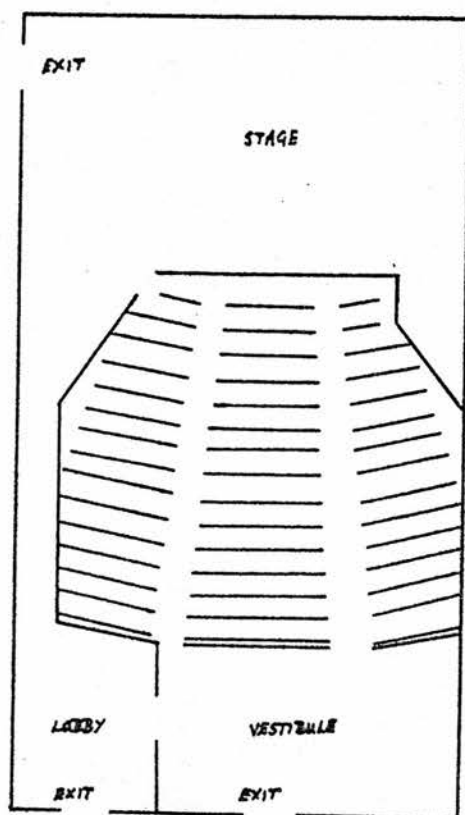
The plan which follows is my own simplification - made closely to scale - of the architects' plans.<sup>3</sup> The house seated two hundred and ninety-nine. Despite the close proximity of a number of theatres on and around Broadway (which, in this district, crosses Seventh Avenue at Times Square and moves towards Eighth Avenue), the Little Theatre in 1912 was regarded as rather far

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1. Programme for A Pair of Silk Stockings, October 20, 1914. Author's collection.
  2. 'The Little Theatre', American Architect (April 17, 1912)
  3. See American Architect (April 17, 1912).

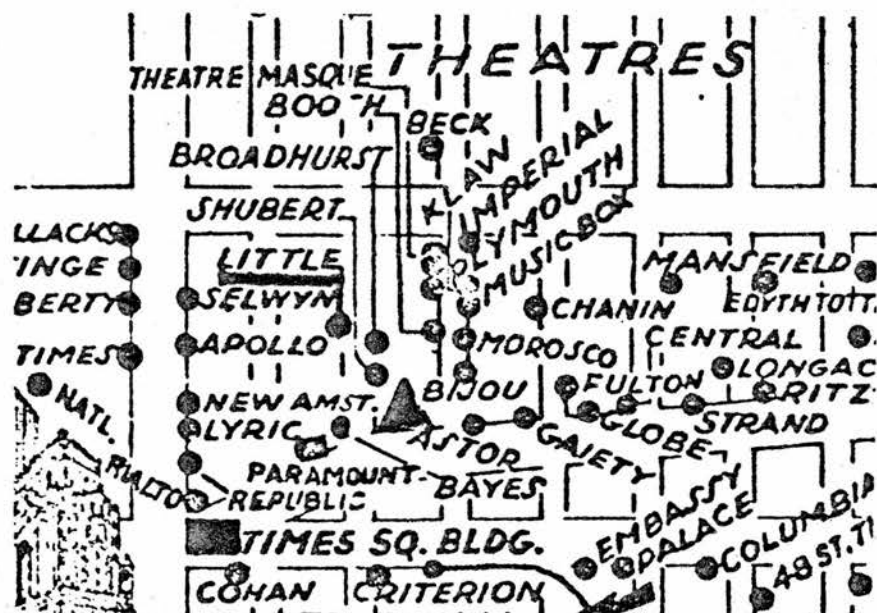
**WINTHROP AMES**

**DIRECTOR**





WEST 44TH STREET.





from the Street.<sup>1</sup> South of Times Square and a little east of Broadway was situated the Comedy Theatre, a house of the Washington Square Players. Ten blocks to the north, off Eighth Avenue, the Guild Theatre would be built.

The Little Theatre especially sought to present plays of a finer quality than could generally be seen, in an intimate atmosphere. The artistic policy aimed at unusual plays. The founder, Winthrop Ames, who had moved from the New Theatre to build this one according to his personal specifications, outlined his policy in an article<sup>2</sup> for the New York Telegraph:

In spite of its small size, the Little Theatre will not have the effect of a hall or lyceum. It is a complete theatre merely reduced from the average dimensions - no smaller, indeed somewhat larger, than many a theatre of the same type abroad as, for instance, the Little Theatre in London, Reinhardt's Kammererspiele [sic] in Berlin, or the Théâtre des Arts in Paris. All of these were built with the same idea in mind - the close connection between actor and audience that all the subtle shades of voice and expression so important to the effect of modern plays may reach the spectators. But there are to be no galleries, no balconies, no boxes. Every seat in the house is an orchestra seat and every seat is as good as every other. The spectator in the last row (the fifteenth) can see and hear quite as well as the one in the first. Sight lines are perfect, and the seats are the most roomy and the widest between rows of any in New York.

One short flight below the auditorium there will be a large lounge to which I hope the audience will resort during the longer intermission. Coffee will be served in the lounge evenings and tea afternoons. I am convinced people enjoy a play more if they don't attempt to sit still throughout the length of an average performance.

But these are the externals. The main point is, what

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1. Enlarged detail of Pictorial Map of New York City (New York, 1928), Harvard Map Collection.
  2. 'Ames Outlines His Plan for Boy's Size Theatre', New York Telegraph, December 20, 1911.

kind of plays are to be presented - what is to be the policy of the Little Theatre. To phrase it in one sentence: I shall try to make it a place of entertainment for intelligent people.

.... The Little Theatre will give its productions on the long run, not the repertory system, for motives of economy and for the sake of giving authors unlimited runs of their plays .... /The selection of specific plays/ will change as I am taught by experience what The Little Theatre patrons prefer. Still, I am anxious to produce as many plays as I can every season, and I plan to make the special matinee performance of unusual plays a regular part of the scheme.

It has been the impression that the prices at The Little Theatre will be high. This is not true. They will be the same that many New York theatres are now charging - that is \$3.50 a seat. I should be sorry indeed to feel that The Little Theatre is only for those of big pocket books.

### III THE NEIGHBORHOOD PLAYHOUSE (1915-1927)

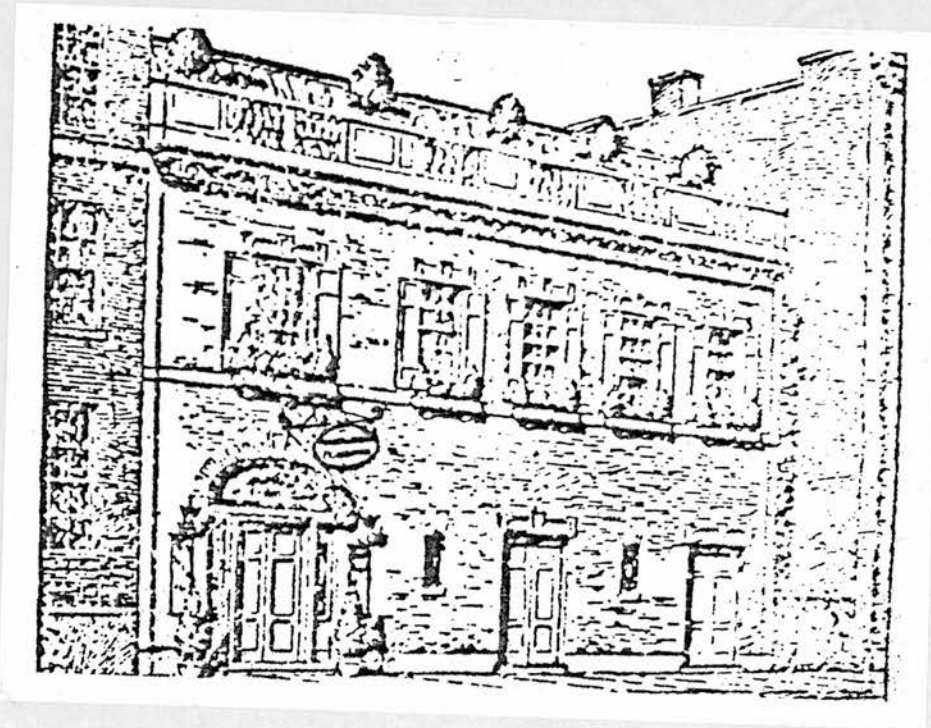
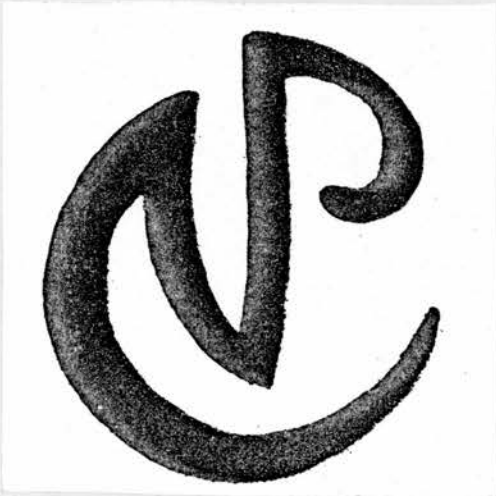
Although the origins of the Neighborhood Players in the Dramatic Club of the Henry Street Settlement went back to a much earlier date, the Playhouse itself opened in 1915 and operated until 1927, with a short break in production in 1922-1923. The monogram was austere but not untypical of the art-décoratif work for publicity material design in which several Art Theatres exhibited an interest (especially the Provincetown and Washington Square Players).<sup>1</sup> The Playhouse, as depicted, still stands, even to the simple sign board over the entrance (renamed the Henry Street Playhouse) amidst the demolition of surrounding property.<sup>2</sup> The exact location is 466, Grand Street.

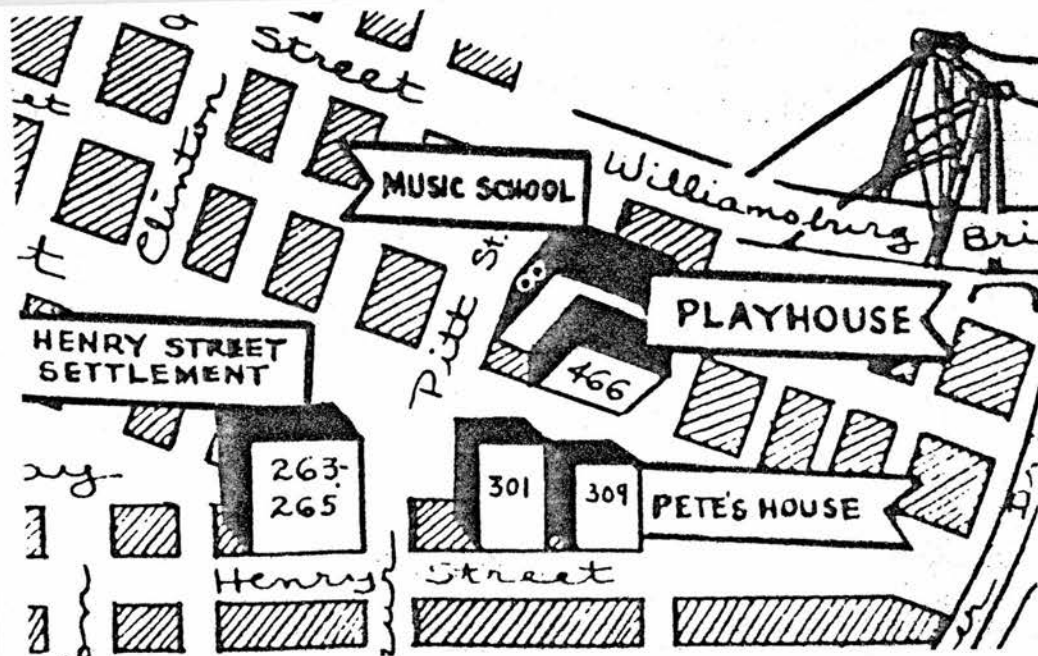
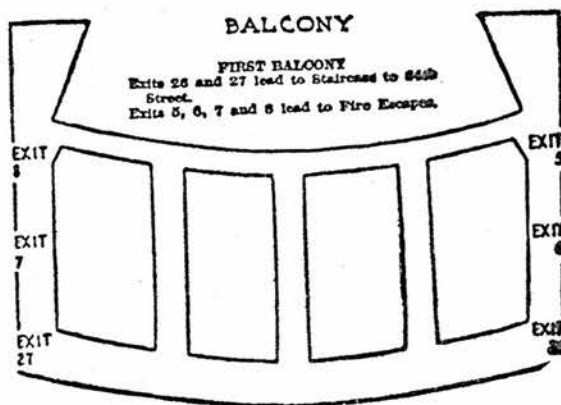
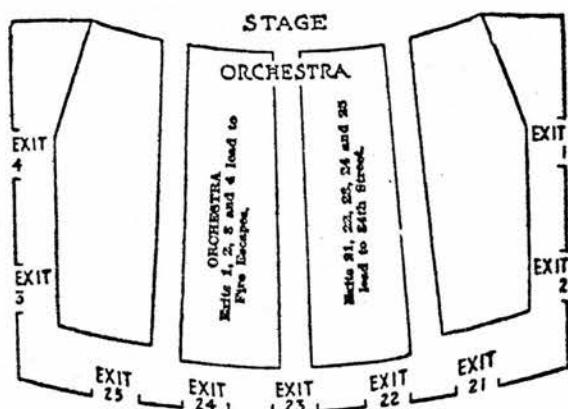
The auditorium contained three hundred and ninety-nine seats.<sup>3</sup> In the heart of the East Side, the Playhouse faced Grand Street, near the corner of Pitt Street, no great distance from the welfare organization, the Henry Street Settlement from which the original players were drawn.<sup>4</sup> Grand Street was, and is, a broad thoroughfare, but the surrounding streets were narrow and extremely poor.

The name of the Playhouse embodied the special emphasis of

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1. 'The Neighborhood Playhouse', Catalogue, 1925. NYPL.TC.
  2. 'The Neighborhood Playhouse', Catalogue, 1915. NYPL.TC.
  3. 'The Neighborhood Playhouse School of the Theatre', Prospectus, 1951-52. NYPL.TC.
  4. NYPL.TC.







the enterprise: the entertainment and instruction of the surrounding mass of poor immigrants. Later this ideal broadened out, but the artistic policy always included strong elements of music, dance, pageantry and exotic spectacle central to mass communication, however much elevated to high art. The 'manifesto' also indicated interest in amateurism of spirit, ensemble, fellowship within the organization and close relationship with the audience:<sup>1</sup>

The Neighborhood Playhouse takes pleasure in announcing the opening of its first season on February Twelfth, Nineteen-hundred and Fifteen.

This new playhouse, at 466 Grand Street, has been designed as an experimental theatre to carry on the work of the dramatic and festival groups of the Henry Street Settlement. For the past eight years the festival groups have presented seasonal festivals and pantomimes in the gymnasium of the Settlement, and for the last three years the Dramatic Club of the Henry Street Settlement, now to be called the Neighborhood Players, has presented at Clinton Hall such plays as 'The Shepherd', by Olive Tilford Dargan, and 'The Silver Box', by John Galsworthy. These productions reached a point where the development of the players, the interest of the audience, and the response of the neighborhood seemed to demand the erection of this playhouse. It hopes to be a community playhouse, where the traditions of the neighborhood can find artistic expression, where anyone with special gifts can contribute his talent, and where interesting productions of serious plays and comedies as well as the lighter forms of entertainment may be found. By the variety of its programs, the playhouse aims to appeal to a public of diverse tastes, interests, and ages, and in this way to share in the life of the neighborhood.

On Saturday and Sunday evenings, the Neighborhood Players will present many plays new to New York audiences -

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1. 'The Neighborhood Playhouse', Leaflet [1915]. NYPL.TC.; and [Alice Lewisohn] TS [June, 1916]. NYPL.TC.



in some instances by unknown American playwrights - and occasionally there will be performances in English and Yiddish by visiting companies of well-known artists. Saturday and Sunday afternoons will be devoted to programs of special interest to children, and will include seasonal festivals, pantomime-ballets and fairy plays by the Festival Groups.

On Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays, the program will consist of moving pictures, playlets, camera talks, folk songs and dances, illustrated fairy tales, marionettes and music, running continuously from half-past one until eleven o'clock. That portion of the bill presented between three and six o'clock will be especially adapted to the interests of school children. On Mondays, the playhouse will be closed for rehearsals.

Besides its programs of entertainment, The Neighborhood Playhouse offers, through its classes and work-shops, instruction in the various arts and trades connected with stage production. All the costumes, settings and properties used in the performance will be made by members of these classes under skilled direction.

From the very first festivals in the Gymnasium, the audiences have always been considered an integral part of the performance ... because of an intense desire to dignify the cultural background of our own club children .... All the work connected with the Neighborhood Playhouse is recognized as a definite effort in directing and fostering aesthetic experience. This does not mean that the Playhouse encourages a professional group or concerns itself merely with genius, but that those who are temperamentally adapted for dramatic and art experience, should have the opportunity of dedicating their leisure to the pursuit of an art expression. The productions of the Playhouse attempt to combine a professional standard with the spirit of the amateur. In many instances the Neighborhood Players admit that they have become critical of the ordinary commercial play and prefer to pursue other professional careers if they can devote their leisure to the Playhouse productions ... It is our belief that the obligation of the Neighborhood Players is to create an atmosphere for those who desire to forget themselves in the pursuit of an art expression. By working together they may experience the joys of fellowship through service to their ideal. But I wish to emphasize that it is not what the individual receives in training or experience that is vital, but rather the aesthetic reaction or exhilaration that comes through concentration, and the struggle to create and give form to some inexplicable striving of the spirit. The result of this striving should be analagous to the cathedrals of the

middle ages, which stand as a composite expression of the community, and yet where the spirit of each craftsman breathes still in every niche. His name and those of his fellow artisans have never come down to us in the hierarchy of artists, and yet their creation stands as a complete expression of aesthetic emotion.

Alice Lewisohn, in association with her sister Irene, presided over and took part in activities throughout. Alice, youthful, wealthy, with strong ideals, philanthropic as well as artistic, had active connections with the Henry Street Settlement and had had some major parts on Broadway before uniting her ideals in the Playhouse.

#### IV THE WASHINGTON SQUARE PLAYERS (1915-1918)

The Washington Square Players opened in 1915 and were active until 1918. The title derived from the neighbourhood in which they were founded, although they never produced regularly in Greenwich Village. The monogram symbol appeared on many programmes, such as this early one of 1915.<sup>1</sup> The Players settled at the Bandbox Theatre (illustrated here) at 205/9 East 57th. Street, before moving to the Comedy in 1916.<sup>2</sup> The photograph is probably almost contemporary with the Players' tenancy. The theatre was closed soon after the Players left and converted to business premises. There is now a cinema there.

The Bandbox, between Second and Third Avenues, was in the same neighbourhood as the American Laboratory Theatre.<sup>3</sup> The Laboratory would begin to operate in the 1920s, three blocks to the south.

The Washington Square Players, from whom the Theatre Guild was to derive, emphasised as ideals dramatic excellence, non-commercialism, experimentation and the fostering of a subscription audience:<sup>4</sup>

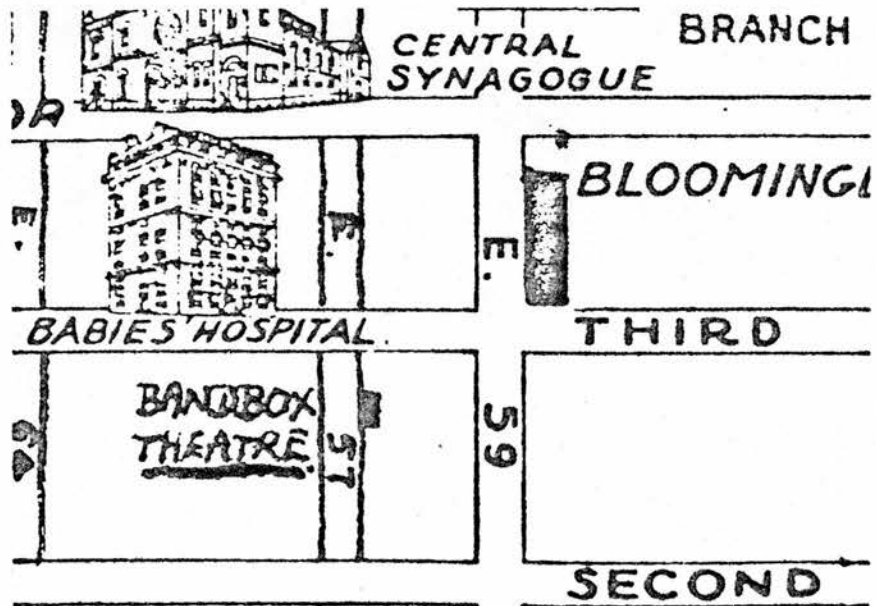
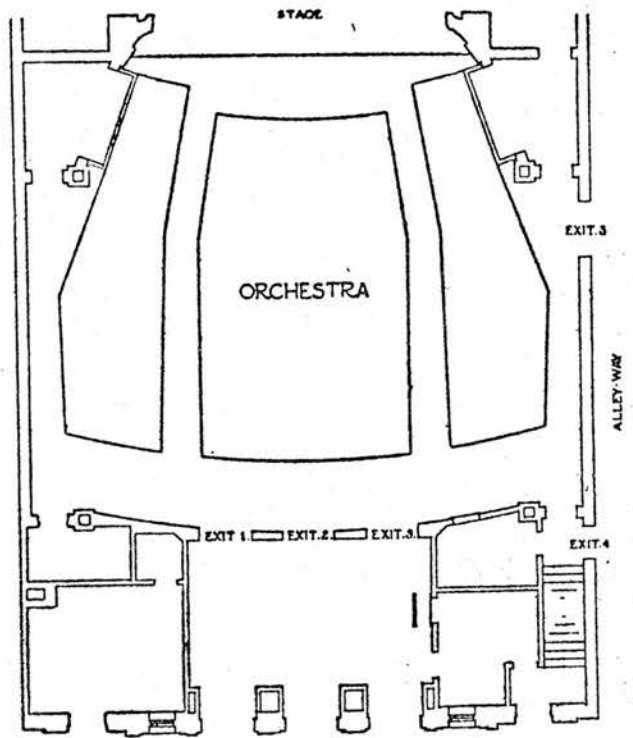
The Washington Square Players, Inc. - an organization which takes its name from the district where it originated - is composed of individuals who believe in the future of

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1. Programme of The Clod, January 10, 1915. Author's Collection. The plan, illustrated later, is from the same source.
  2. NYPL.TC.
  3. Enlarged detail of Pictorial Map of New York City (New York, 1928). Harvard Map Collection.
  4. Programme of Interior, February 19, 1915. H.TC.



THE  
WASHINGTON  
SQUARE PLAYERS





the theatre in America, and includes playwrights, actors and producers, working with a common end in view. The fact that the Drama League can recommend at the present time, as worthy of the attention of its members, only three plays running in New York City (of which two are by foreign authors, while two productions are by English and part-English companies) is an incisive comment upon the present condition of American drama. The Washington Square Players believe that a higher standard can be reached only as the outcome of experiment and initiative. Just as the finished productions of Mr. Granville Barker - which are now delighting New York audiences at Wallack's Theatre - are the culmination of a growth of some years in the development of new methods of acting and production in English drama, so we believe that hard work and perseverance, coupled with ability and the absence of purely commercial considerations, may result in the birth and healthy growth of an artistic theatre in this country. Your wholehearted support - a sympathetic appreciation of the possibilities of our experiment - will encourage us to greater efforts.

We have only one policy in regard to the plays which we will produce - they must have artistic merit. Preference will be given to American plays, but we shall also include in our repertory the works of well-known European authors which have been ignored by the commercial managers.

Though not organized for the purpose of profit, we are not endowed. Money alone has never produced an artistic theatre. We are going to defray the expenses of our productions by the sale of tickets and subscriptions. Believing in democracy in the theatre, we have fixed the charge for admission at 50 cents. If we can secure sufficient support by the purchase of individual tickets, or subscriptions for ten tickets (two for each of our monthly performances) at the cost of \$5.00, we shall be able to continue our work.

If you are in sympathy with our work, we shall welcome you in our organization. You may be able to help us in a number of ways, whether you be playwright, actor, producer, or capable of assisting us in some executive capacity.

Our ultimate success depends upon our ability to accomplish our purpose AND your interest.

Edward Goodman came to the Players as a manager and director from the dramatic society of the Socialist Press Club



and remained the prominent figure throughout the Players' activities. Lawrence Langner, Helen Westley, Philip Moeller and Lee Simonson gained experience here before going on to found the Theatre Guild.

## V THE PROVINCETOWN (1915-1929)

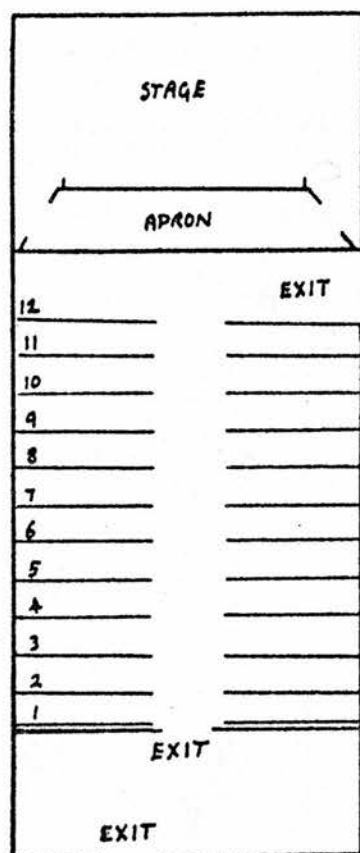
The Provincetown took its name from that of the Massachusetts fishing town at the tip of Cape Cod where the theatre opened in 1915. The group was one of the longest-lived of all the Art Theatres considered here, operating until 1929. It used a number of titles during this period: the Provincetown Players, the Playwrights' Theatre, the Provincetown Playhouse, the Experimental Theatre and the Provincetown Playhouse at the Garrick. The change from Players to Playhouse in 1923 was especially important because of the significance of deeper changes of personnel and policy. For the sake of simplicity, I consistently use the phrase 'the Provincetown' to cover all these titles, except when occasion demands the use of one more specific. No particular emblem was outstanding at the Provincetown. Since the group introduced some interesting experiments with masks, I have selected this motif from a publicity leaflet of 1923.<sup>1</sup> As is frequently the case in this study, the theatre illustrated was one of several the group occupied. This is 133, Macdougall Street where the group worked between 1918 and 1929.<sup>2</sup>

I have reconstructed a simple auditorium plan from contemporary photographs.<sup>3</sup> Audience capacity was two hundred.

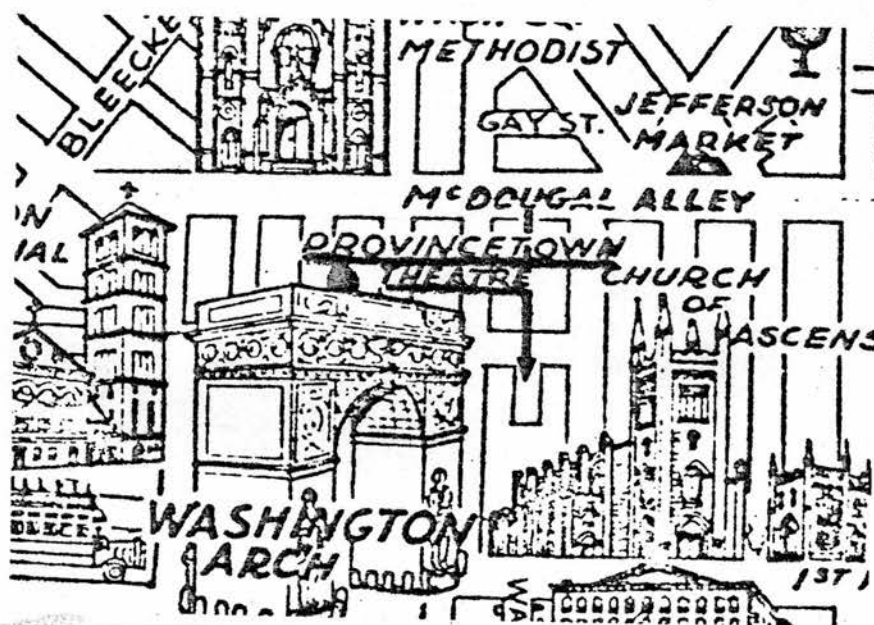
1. Leaflet [1923]. NYPL.TC.
2. E.H. Suydam, 'The Home of the Provincetown Players', New York Herald Tribune [1926-27]. NYPL.TC.
3. 'McDougall Street' appears on some maps, more often it was rendered 'Macdougall Street'.







M<sup>c</sup>DOUGAL STREET.



Near to Washington Square in Greenwich Village, the theatre was situated only a few doors away from 139, Macdougall Street, from which the group had moved in 1918 and with which both the American Laboratory Theatre and the Washington Square Players had also had connections.<sup>1</sup> Close at hand in the Village were the Cherry Lane and Grove Street theatres of the New Playwrights, and the Greenwich Village Theatre, used by the Provincetown in 1924-1925.

The Provincetown emphasised the production of American plays in experimental ways:<sup>2</sup>

The present organization is the outcome of a group of people interested in the theatre, who gathered spontaneously during two summers in Provincetown, Massachusetts, for the purpose of writing, producing and acting their own plays. The impelling desire of the group was to establish a stage where playwrights of sincere, poetic, literary and dramatic purpose could see their plays in action and superintend their productions without submitting to the commercial manager's interpretation of public taste. Equally, it was to afford an opportunity for actors, producers, scenic and costume-designers to experiment with a stage of extremely limited resources - it being the idea of the Players that elaborate settings are unnecessary to bring out the essential qualities of a good play.

George Cram Cook was prominent in founding and managing the theatre in its early years. Once a teacher of English, Cook was an aspiring professional writer. He was a domineering

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1. Enlarged detail of Pictorial Map of New York City (New York, 1928). Harvard Map Collection.
  2. 'The Provincetown Players', Leaflet /September, 1916/. NYPL.TC. And see H. Deutsch and S. Hanau, The Provincetown: A Story of the Theatre (1931; rpt. New York, 1959), pp.17-18.

personality, an archetypal idealist and a colourful Village character with his renowned flowing white hair and black cloak. The Provincetown attracted a great many talents: some of the best known are Eugene O'Neill, playwright; Cook's wife, Susan Glaspell, playwright; critic, author and producer, Kenneth Macgowan; and designer, Robert Edmund Jones.<sup>1</sup>

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1. A brief account of each is included in Appendix A.

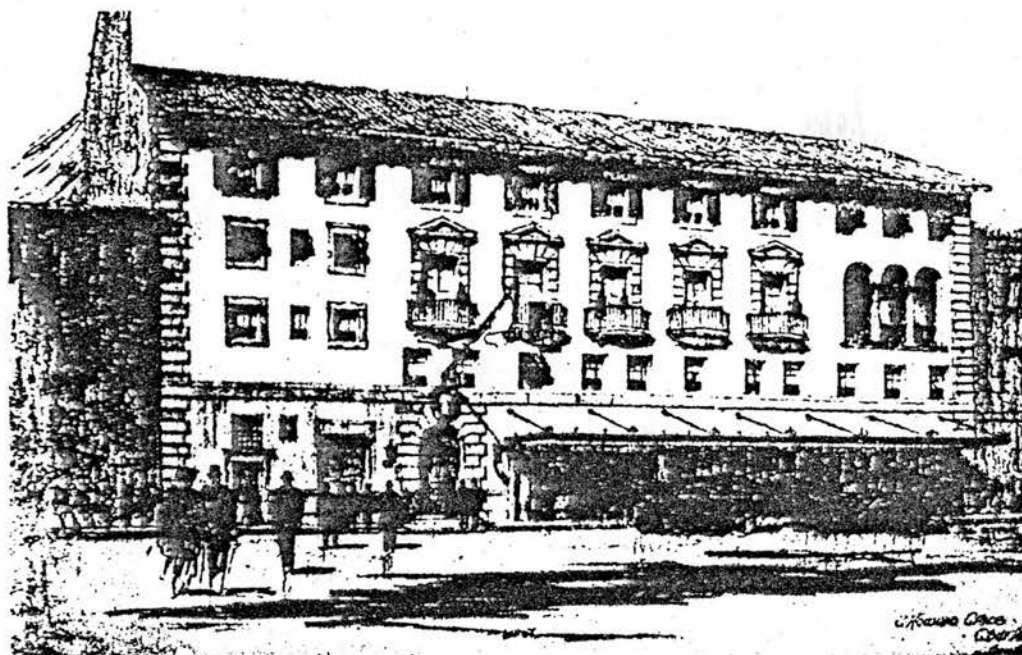


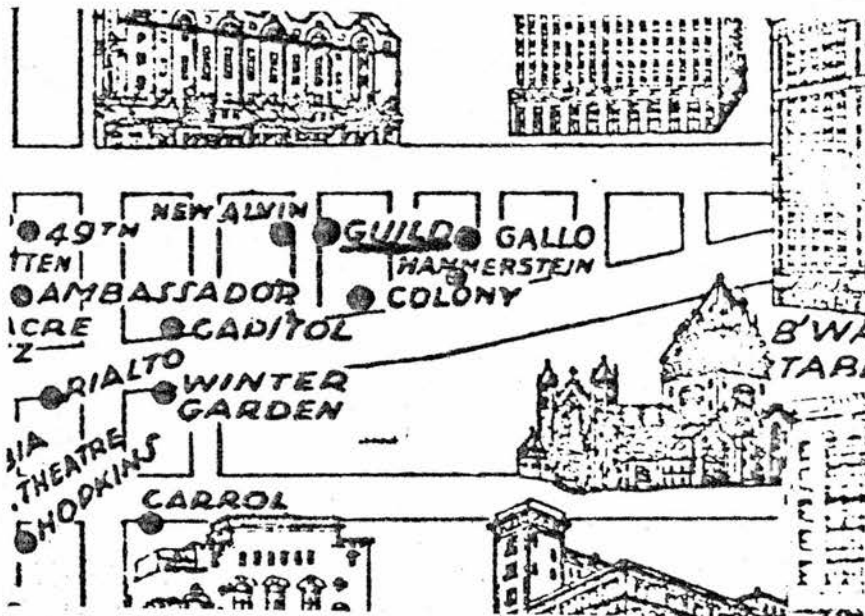
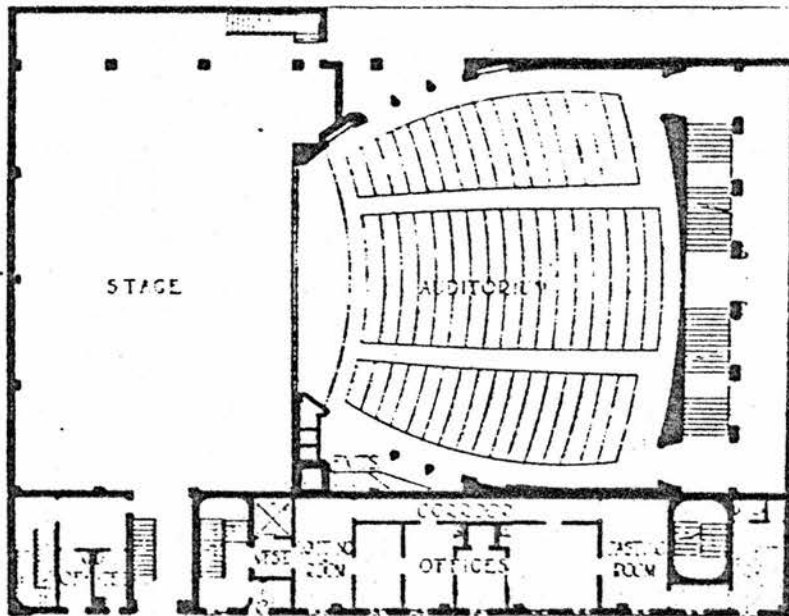
## VI THE THEATRE GUILD (1919-1930+)

The Theatre Guild continued to operate long after 1930, the only theatre of the group to survive the Depression. In this study, I am concerned only with the ten-year period between 1919 and 1930, the years in which the organization was truly an Art Theatre. The producer-manager Lawrence Langner recalled that he bestowed the unusual title, 'remembering the famous medieval guild houses in Brussels ... to indicate the various branches of stagecraft we intended to incorporate into our theatre'.<sup>1</sup> In fact he probably came across the term in T.H. Dickinson's book The Insurgent Theatre, published in 1917. I have quoted the relevant passage in Chapter I, page 5, where Dickinson mentions a 'co-operative guild of artists'. Publicity materials bore the illustrated symbol of the Guild, with its medieval connotations.<sup>2</sup> While Guild productions appeared at many different theatres, the organization was based first in the Garrick Theatre, then in its own Guild Theatre, which opened in 1925.<sup>3</sup> The second illustration shows the façade of the Guild Theatre on the north side of West 52nd. Street.

The auditorium accommodated one thousand one hundred seats.<sup>4</sup>

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1. The Magic Curtain (New York, 1952), p.116.
  2. 'Fifth Birthday Dinner', Leaflet, March 13, 1924. NYPL.TC.
  3. C.H. Bettis, 'The Guild Theatre, New York', Architectural Forum (July, 1925).
  4. 'The Guild Theatre', Architectural Forum (July, 1925).







In 1925 the location of the Guild Theatre was considered rather far to the north of the 'theatre district', as the Little Theatre had been considered too far to the west.<sup>1</sup> The Little Theatre was some ten blocks to the south at the other end of the 'district', the American Laboratory Theatre across on East 54th. Street.

The Theatre Guild, like the Washington Square Players, particularly emphasised the selection of fine plays, whether American or European in origin, matched by equally fine production standards. The 'manifesto' also mentions intimacy and co-operative enterprise:<sup>2</sup>

If that young theatre which has manifested its energies in so many communities of the United States is to establish its ideal, it must be in the foundation of a permanent theatre. The vigor of the new impulse in the theatre is undeniable - the Washington Square Players and similar organizations in Chicago, Detroit, Los Angeles and other cities were demonstrations of its fresh purpose. For these pioneers there were difficulties, at times insurmountable, but the pathway is now laid.

It is the aim of the New York Theatre Guild to concentrate these younger energies and eventually to achieve a synthesis of those varied and neglected arts which are of the theatre. Here, it is hoped, will be founded a working centre for the artists of the theatre; and, as in the old guilds, craftsmanship will be the only standard and fraternity its spirit.

The New York Theatre Guild will keep its doors open to playwrights, actors, producers and designers, and invites their co-operation. Its productions will include both long and short plays, of American and foreign authorship, and these will be chosen wholly for their quality and human appeal.

A comedy and a classical revival or bill of one act plays will be presented for a period of four weeks each

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1. Enlarged detail of Pictorial Map of New York City (New York, 1928). Harvard Map Collection.
  2. 'The New York Theatre Guild', New York Evening Sun, March 1, 1919.

during the preliminary season. The names of these will be announced later.

The Garrick Theatre, which has recently been remodelled, is an intimate theatre, admirably suited to modern plays and methods of production. It is now used by the French company and will be occupied by the Theatre Guild at the close of the season of French plays, in the beginning of April.

As the Theatre Guild believes in a democratic appeal, and that the audience is the other half of that whole which is the theatre, the prices for single seats will range from \$1.50 to 25 cents.

The producing and managing board included Lawrence Langner, driving force behind the foundation of the Guild, in association with Philip Moeller, playwright and director; Lee Simonson, designer; Helen Westley, actress; and others. An immigrant from Wales, Langner found time to develop a successful law practice in international patents as well as an active interest in producing, managing and playwriting.

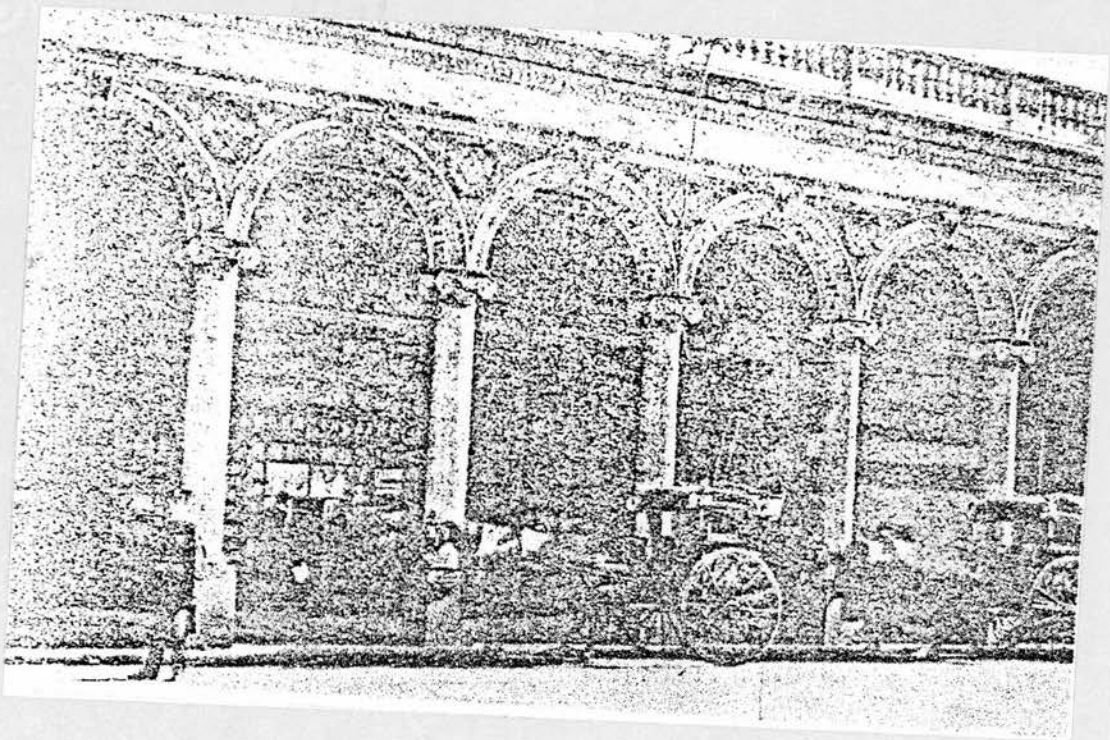
## VII THE JEWISH ART THEATRE (1919-1921)

The Jewish Art Theatre operated for only two seasons, between 1919 and 1921. The group's symbol was simply a depiction of their premises with Yiddish inscription.<sup>1</sup> In fact the inscription does not translate precisely as 'the Jewish Art Theatre': whereas one of the founders, Emanuel Reicher, had earnestly demanded the use of the word 'Art' in the title, another, Jacob Ben-Ami, had equally sincerely felt that such a description should be earned, not imposed. In Yiddish therefore the theatre was 'the New Yiddish Theatre'. The duality was a compromise. Their premises, previously known as the Garden Theatre, had opened in 1890 as part of the Madison Square Garden complex, one of New York's many landmarks, before that institution moved across to Eighth Avenue.<sup>2</sup> The corner occupied by the theatre at 61, Madison Avenue, is illustrated below. Developers later demolished the building to make way for business premises.

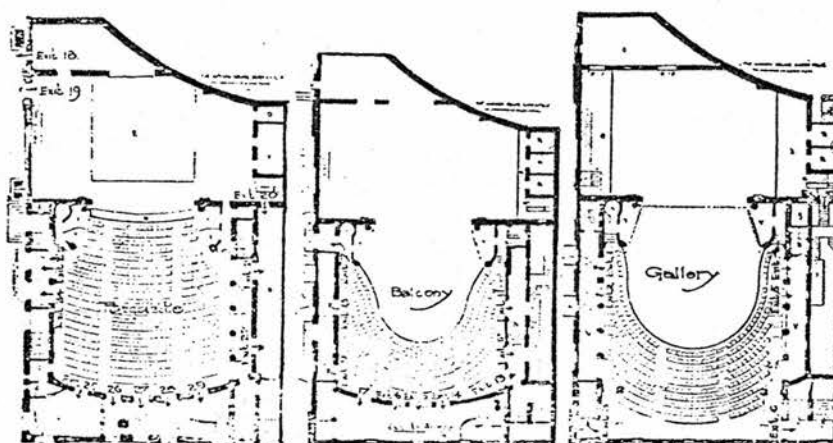
There were some one thousand seats in the auditorium.<sup>3</sup> The theatre stood at the junction of Madison Avenue and East 27th Street, off the north-east corner of Madison Square.<sup>4</sup> The

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1. Programme of The Idle Inn, September 1, 1919. NYPL.TC.
  2. 'America's Leading Theatres', New York Star, April 24, 1909.
  3. 'The Garden Theatre', Souvenir Programme, October 27, 1890. NYPL.TC.
  4. Enlarged detail of Pictorial Map of New York City (New York, 1928). Harvard Map Collection.





## GARDEN THEATRE EXITS.



Exits 18 and 19, from Stage to 27th St.

" 20, from Stage to Madison Ave.

" 23 and 24, to 27th St.

" 21 and 22, to Madison Ave.

" 25, 26, 27, 28 and 29, to Madison Ave. and 27th St.

Exits 7, 8 and 9, to 27th St.

" 11, 12 and 13, to Madison Ave.

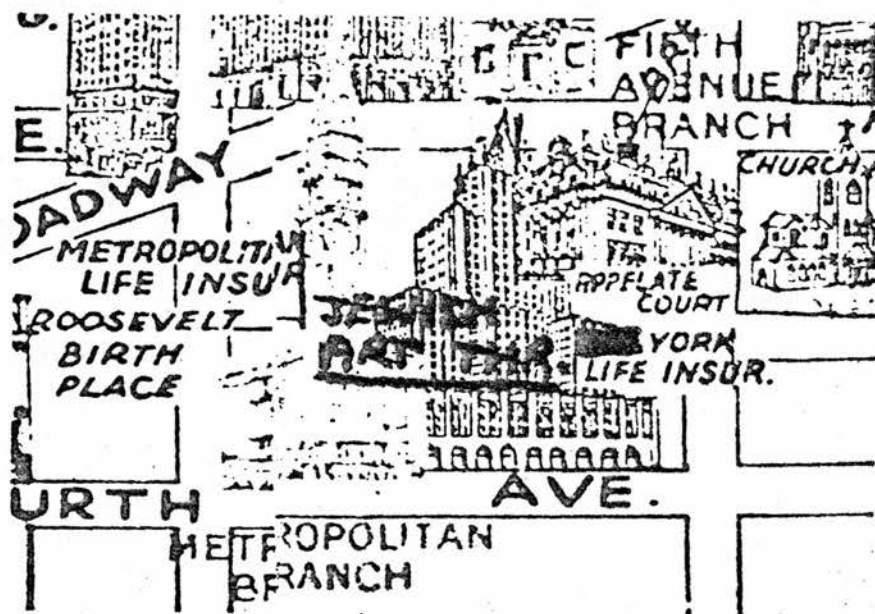
" 14, 15, 16 and 17, to 27th St.

or Madison Ave.

Exits 1, 2 and 3, to 27th St.

" 4, 5 and 6, to Madison Ave.

" 20, from Stage to Madison Ave.



neighbourhood was a varied one, with a number of business premises close at hand (banks and insurance buildings), city offices (the Appellate Court), hotels (the Vanderbilt was close on Fourth Avenue) and even the famously incongruous Church-Around-The-Corner.

The Jewish Art Theatre placed particular emphasis on ensemble acting and co-operative activity, as these 'manifestos' clearly show:<sup>1</sup>

The Jewish Art Theatre is that happy combination of ideals and good management which is the foundation for a fine artistic enterprise - It will mark a new epoch in the history of the Jewish theatre, for its aims are to place the Jewish Theatre on a level with the best that is done on the non-Jewish stage - It is endowed with young enthusiasm, talent and good plays - With your help it will be the first Jewish theatre in America.

1. No stars. Each actor was to play that role commensurate with his talent.
2. The director would assign roles according to actors' abilities.
3. No actor might refuse a role, but he might study a role he prefers, and was to have an opportunity to demonstrate at a rehearsal what he could do with the role. The director was to have the final decision; could also decide that one role could be alternately played by more than one actor.
4. The director might not act in a play which he directs.
5. The leading man in one play must play a minor role in the next production.
6. Each member of the troupe, if not appearing in a play, must, if required, play as a super if such a role is necessary.
7. All publicity which mentions names of actors must list

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1. Jewish News, August 29, 1919; and Der Tag, September 14, 1919, in D.F. Lifson, 'A History of the Yiddish Art Theatre Movement in New York: 1918-1940', Diss. New York University 1963, pp.5-6.



names alphabetically in uniform-size print.

8. In the overall artistic and cultural aspect of the theatre, there shall be a committee to determine policies: it shall consist of two authors, two scenic artists, and two actors. The director shall consult this committee in connection with the artistic ways and means of the production.

For the first and most important year of activity, the then little known Jacob Ben-Ami acted and directed. Sensitive and ambitious for personal success as well as for raising the standards of Yiddish theatre, he, like so many other Art Theatre directors, came to New York from Europe, arriving before the outbreak of the First World War. He was born in Russia and before assisting in founding the Jewish Art Theatre had acted with the company of Boris Thomashevsky and both acted and produced for Maurice Schwartz.

## VIII THE AMERICAN LABORATORY THEATRE (1923-1930)

The American Laboratory Theatre opened in 1923 (although public productions did not begin until 1925) and operated until 1930, with a short break in production in 1928-29. The word 'Laboratory' was taken from the article 'The Laboratory Theatre' written by Richard Boleslavsky for the Theatre Arts Magazine of 1923, an article which directly inspired others to invite its author to help found the new theatre.<sup>1</sup> The first illustration of a frequently used symbol is from a promotional catalogue for the season 1924-25.<sup>2</sup> There follows an illustration of the façade of the largest of the many properties the theatre occupied in the city: 222, East 54th. Street (once a brewery) in which it operated from 1927-30.<sup>3</sup> The building no longer exists.

Although the catalogue of 1927-28 published the illustrated plan of the two hundred and fifty-four seat auditorium, I have reason to believe that this might be the plan of the property 145, East 58th. Street.<sup>4</sup> A comparable plan of 222, East 54th. Street is not available. The map shows the Laboratory on the south side of East 54th. Street, between Second and Third Avenues.<sup>5</sup> Three blocks north, the Washington Square Players' Bandbox Theatre

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1. July, 1923, p.245.

2. 'American Laboratory Theatre', Catalogue. NYPL.TC.

3. 'American Laboratory Theatre', Catalogue, 1927-28. NYPL.TC.

4. Ibid.

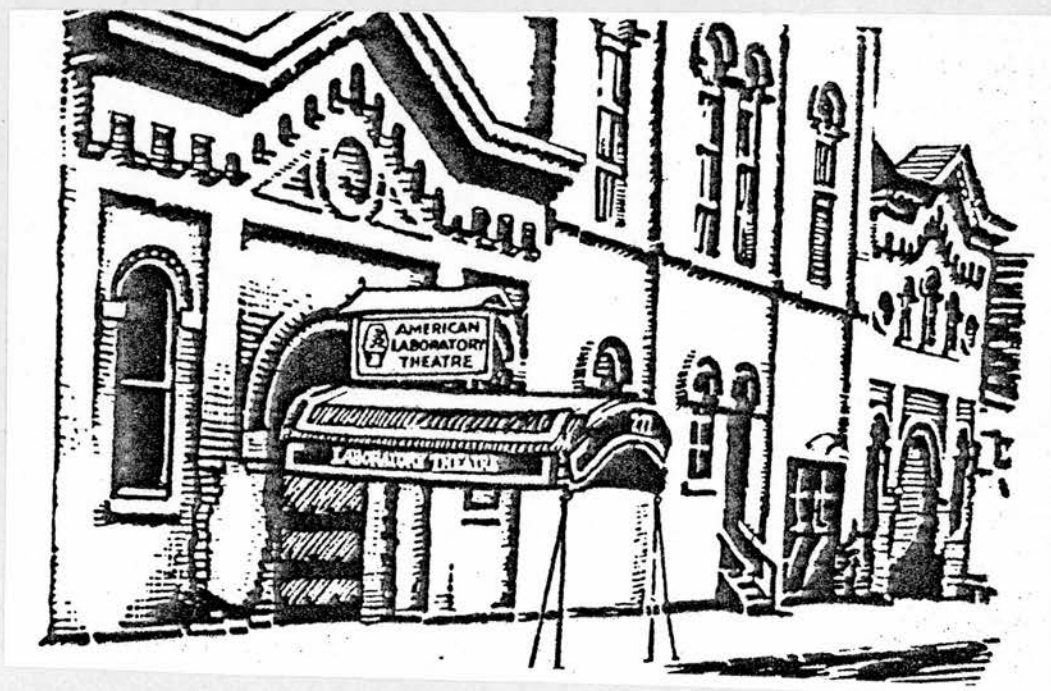
5. Enlarged detail of Pictorial Map of New York City (New York, 1928). Harvard Map Collection.

1924

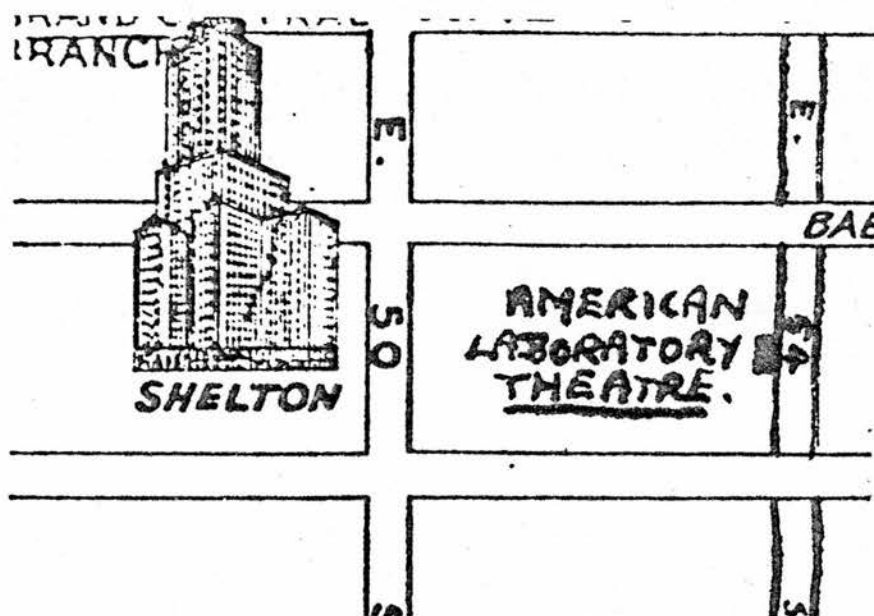
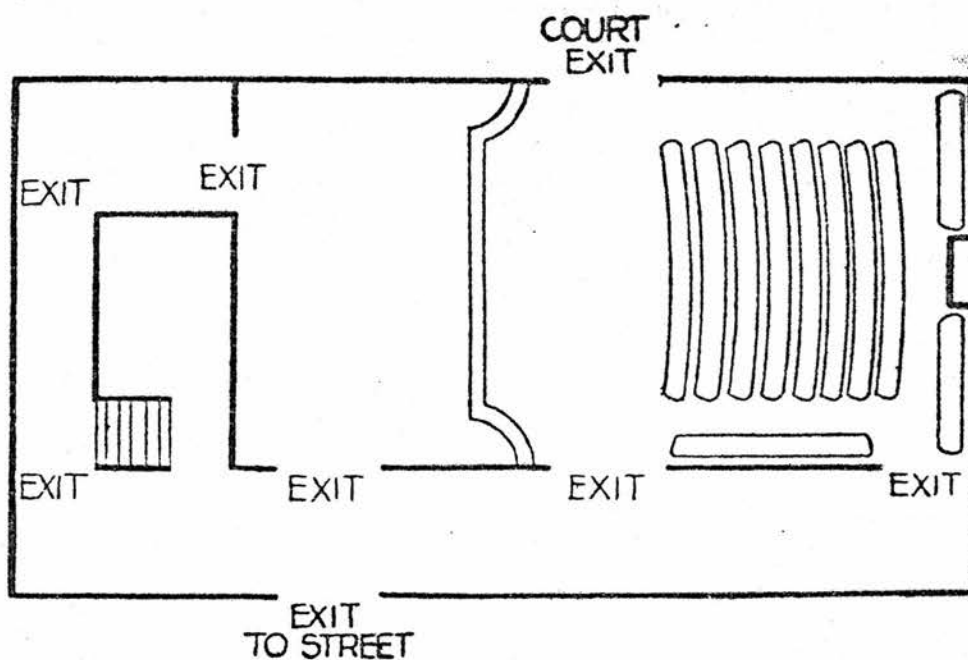


1925

The American Laboratory Theatre







had been located; on 52nd. Street directly across to the west side, was the Theatre Guild's Guild Theatre. No buildings of particular interest are evident in the rather anonymous area of small properties of the neighbourhood. The Shelton Hotel lay some blocks to the south.

The American Laboratory Theatre, closely related to an acting school, emphasised the artistic qualities of acting (specifically an extension of the 'Stanislavsky method') and repertory. The following 'manifesto' serves to demonstrate this emphasis, but shows too that the emphasis was not exclusive.<sup>1</sup> Here can be seen the desire to pursue the ideals of general experiment, non-commercialism, intimacy and co-operation of members in the organization:

Some actors, artist-designers and even a few directors ... attempt to accomplish something by experiment ... But they are helpless in their own art .... To contemplate, to search, to create - for this there is no place. There are no laboratories of the theatre, there are no tense experiments and achievements, no tedious labor discovering new forms, no fling of imagination, no joy of attainment. There is no creation. There is only repetition and occasional blind luck, only occasional, as in a card game .... a real artist cannot only sell his wares ... he must have his own creative laboratory - and there are no such laboratories ....

Such laboratories require very small material resources at first, but enormous spiritual resources. They do not pay big cash profits, but give great indirect benefits, raising the culture of the country through the main travelled roads of the theatre. They do not present productions costing a million dollars, but create new forms which will influence the world.

The laboratories embrace in their organization all

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1. R. Boleslavsky, 'The Laboratory Theatre', Theatre Arts Magazine (July, 1923), p.245.

the workers who take part in a performance .... The real theatre is the purest form of collective creation. This means submission to the single will of the régisseur ....

Creation requires the consecration of its members to the work of the theatre with its disappointments, and blunders, its truths and revelations .... The Laboratory is no place for people who wish to make a quick fortune. The groups must be very small. Some of the performances should not even be open to the public. During the first five or six years each laboratory would barely be able to maintain the fifteen or twenty people working in it. But any such laboratory could push forward the theatrical art of the country twenty years .... Such a theatre might develop into a successful repertory theatre, ready to cede its place to new laboratories ....

The actor in such a theatre must never play two parts identically ... he must play Hamlet today, and tomorrow appear as a beggar in a mob scene ... And both these parts must be for him equally objects of creation and to both of them he must give all his force and all his talents. In such a theatre a young actor, knowing that he will be part of the group the entire year and need not worry about his bread and butter, can consecrate his time to education and the perfection of his art; he can be taught singing, dancing, fencing; he can read and hear lectures.

Every laboratory theatre must point the way to the laboratory of the future. A theatre lives no more than a generation. Then it grows old and dies, or, if it continues to exist hundreds of years it comes to have simply a museum value, to become a kind of living archive, a store-house of dead tradition, like the Comédie Française. So much the worse for any theatre that has not shown the right path to its heirs; that has not made them wise with its own wisdom and lighted their torch from its own flame. There is only one path in art - the path of search and experience - personal experience of one's own sufferings and trials and not that derived from 'superiors'. In these laboratories the art of the theatre is continually reformed. Everything that is good in the old is passed on from one



generation to another, not as dead and decayed, but as renewed and revived.

The actor-director, Richard Boleslavsky, dominated the organization for most of its active years. Boleslavsky, who had long been associated with the Moscow Art Theatre in Russia, arrived in the United States in 1922. Intellectual, ambitious and not always a popular figure, he mastered a new language sufficiently rapidly to be able to give public lectures early in 1923 at the Princess Theatre, before the American Laboratory Theatre opened in November of the same year, Boleslavsky directing. Another European from the Moscow Art Theatre, Maria Ouspenskaya, was also prominent in the theatre as teacher and actress.

## IX THE CIVIC REPERTORY THEATRE (1926-1933)

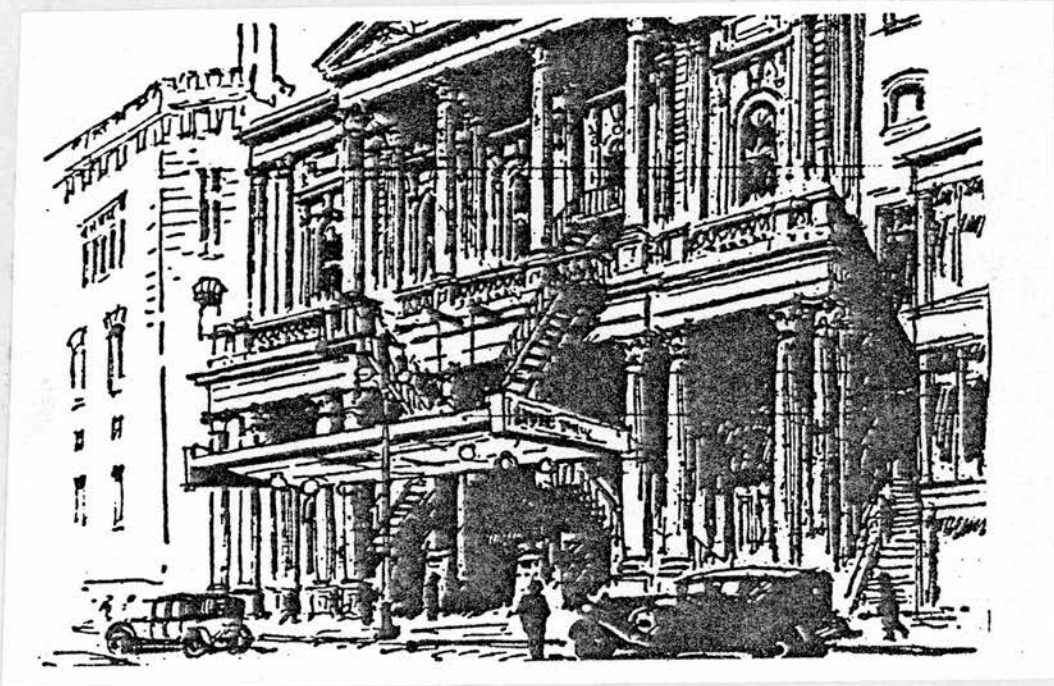
The Civic Repertory Theatre opened in 1926 and operated at the 14th. Street Theatre, renamed the Civic Repertory Theatre, until early 1933 with a short break in production in 1931-32. Eva Le Gallienne who founded the theatre had wanted to call the theatre the 'People's Repertory Theatre' but discovered that the title was already in use at an upstate stock company. The impresa with which the programmes and publicity materials were decorated shows a windmill with the motto 'In Sua Movenza E Fermo Immobili'.<sup>1</sup> Its origin is not clear, but in this context is almost certainly meant to suggest that drama stands eternal while forms may change. This illustration is taken from the theatre collection in the New York Public Library. The 'Old Fourteenth Street' Theatre pictured here was indeed one of the oldest surviving theatres in the city, built in 1866, better known in its illustrious past as 'Haverly's'.<sup>2</sup> In the drawing, the Civic Repertory sign is still up on the street awning although the company was not in occupation that season (1934). The location was 105, West 14th. Street.

A plan shows the lay-out of the one thousand, one hundred seat auditorium.<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately the building has long since

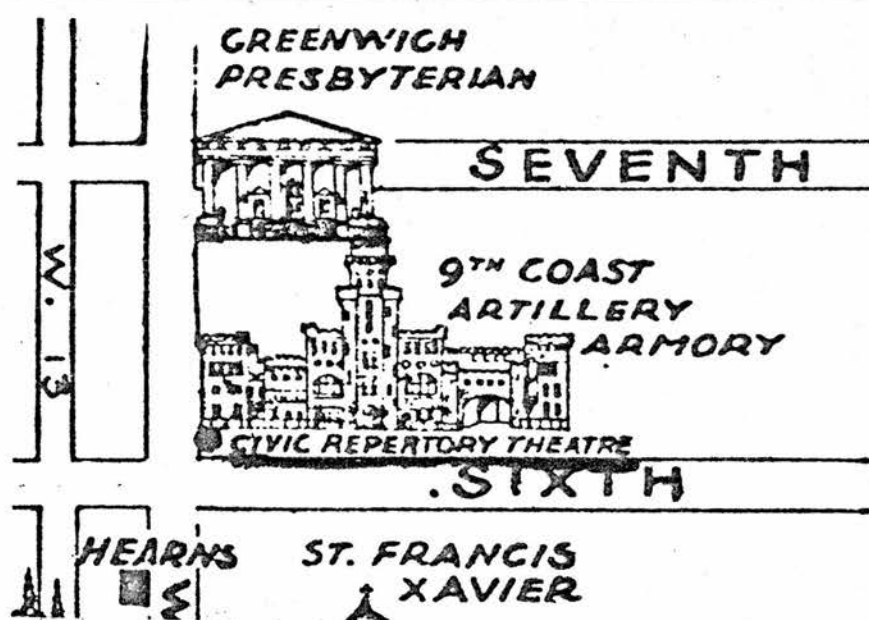
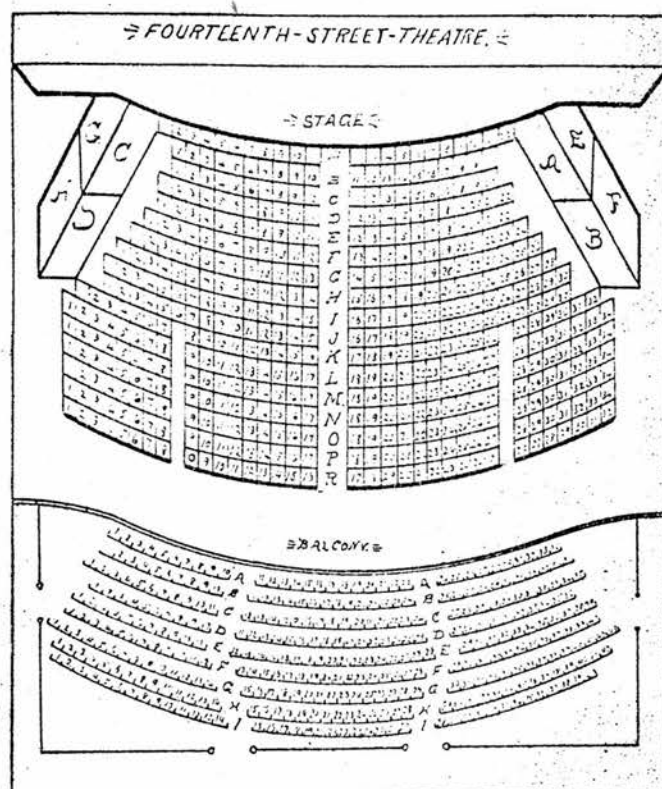
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1. 'The Civic Repertory Theatre', Leaflet, October 21, 1927. NYPL.TC.
  2. V.H. Bailey, 'Intimate Sketches of New York', New York Sun, April 3, 1934.
  3. NYPL.TC.



**THE CIVIC  
REPERTORY  
THEATRE**







been demolished (in 1938). The map indicates the theatre close to the corner of Sixth Avenue on the north side of West 14th. Street.<sup>1</sup> Some nine blocks south and a little way off Sixth Avenue was Macdougall Street and the Provincetown. Approximately the same distance down Seventh Avenue was another Provincetown property of previous years, the Greenwich Village Theatre. West 14th. Street was a main east-west thoroughfare, fashionable in the last century, but now lined by sometimes delapidated buildings. Immediately to the west of the theatre stood the 9th. Coast Artillery Armory.

The Civic Repertory emphasised popular priced repertory. The following 'manifestos' also show an interest in special artistic policy and building a loyal audience:<sup>2</sup>

The true Theatre of America must be created by the people themselves. Their demand will create the supply. The theatre must become an integral part of the community.

The theatre is important only in proportion to the need it fills in the lives of the people. It should be a source of mental and spiritual stimulation to the community.

The theatre should be an instrument for giving,

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1. Enlarged detail of Pictorial Map of New York City (New York, 1928). Harvard Map Collection.
  2. E. Le Gallienne, 'The Civic Repertory Theatre', October 21, 1927. NYPL.TC.; E. Le Gallienne, 'The Civic Repertory Theatre', Leaflet, October 28, 1927. NYPL.TC.; and 'About Eva Le Gallienne and Her Civic Repertory Theatre', Leaflet 1927. NYPL.TC.

not a machinery for getting. 'It should be to the town what a library is to the individual'.

The Civic Repertory Theatre, which has been established by Eva Le Gallienne on 14th. Street, New York, differs in many important respects from any other theatrical institution in America.

It does not compete, nor does it want to compete, with the Broadway Theatres. It is not in any sense a commercial venture. It is not interested in securing straight long runs for the plays it produces. On the other hand it does want to produce the most worthwhile American and European plays. It does want to build up a band of regular supporters. It does want to become a recognized part of cultural facilities such as are supplied in other fields by the library, the museum and the opera.

Miss Le Gallienne has founded her theatre largely after the model of the State-subsidised theatres which exist in almost every European town of importance. That is to say she wants each season to produce a number of plays which she believes have permanent value, and once they are produced keep them in her repertoire. That means that once a play is staged, even though it will not immediately enjoy a long run, it will be forever accessible because it will be played each season sufficiently often to afford all those who wish to do so an opportunity of seeing it ....

Nor is this all. To found such a theatre would be almost useless if its prices were as high as those of Broadway because, to realize its full value, people of moderate means must not only be able to go to it, but to go to it often. And so the present prices of the Civic Repertory Theatre are the lowest in New York - only \$1.65 for an orchestra seat.

But Miss Le Gallienne is not satisfied with that. She wants a theatre in which the top price is only seventy-five cents and a seat in the gallery can be bought for a quarter.

Moreover the theatre of her ideal must not depend for financial support, either upon the city or upon private endowment. It must be a theatre financed by and for the people - a true People's Theatre in the most literal sense of the words.

Eva Le Gallienne presided over the organization throughout



its existence and directed and acted. Like Boleslavsky, Ouspenskaya, Ben-Ami and Langner, she was an immigrant from Europe. Only child of the English poet Richard Le Gallienne, she arrived in New York in 1915. Charismatic and devoted to work which was often physically demanding for her, she founded the Civic Repertory after having played several prominent Broadway roles and produced several plays as leader of her own company.

## X THE NEW PLAYWRIGHTS' THEATRE (1927-1929)

The New Playwrights' Theatre operated between 1927 and 1929 for only one full season and two half seasons. It has been said that the title was chosen out of deference to the Playwrights' Theatre of the Provincetown group, a title which the Provincetowners had used to describe their theatre between 1916 and 1922. It is also possible that the title owed something to the periodical New Masses, with which several of the Playwrights were associated. The Playwrights used Futuristic symbols of the machine age, two of which appear here. Although 'M.G.' beneath the first seems to indicate the work of Michael Gold, almost all the many symbols they printed are after the manner of Louis Lozowick, if not actually by him.<sup>1</sup> The New Playwrights used several different theatres in the short period of their organization. The Cherry Lane, illustrated here, was one of the smallest, but it was the one they most used.<sup>2</sup> The picture, probably taken in the 1930s, shows the quiet back-street neighbourhood in the heart of Greenwich Village

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1. 'The New Playwrights' Theatre', Leaflet February, 1927. NYPL.TC.; and Programme of Fiesta April, 1927. NYPL.TC. Some of Lozowick's designs also appeared in the programmes of the Neighbourhood Playhouse: see Programme of Pinwheel, February 3, 1927. Author's collection.
  2. NYPL.TC.







as well as the drab brick frontage of the then one hundred year old building. It first became a theatre in 1924 and still stands, considerably improved, as an off-off-Broadway house at 40, Commerce Street.

The Cherry Lane seated one hundred and eighty-seven.<sup>1</sup> Commerce Street was surrounded by the clubs and restaurants of Greenwich Village, an area which does not conform to the grid-pattern of the city's uptown streets.<sup>2</sup> The streets are narrow for the most part, with few high buildings and a multitude of small shops and businesses. Hudson Street is the main thoroughfare, crossing a block to the west of Commerce. Parallel to Hudson to the east is Varrick Street, becoming Seventh Avenue. Another theatre used by the Playwrights was on Grove Street to the north (visible on the map), at the east end of which was the Greenwich Village Theatre used by the Provincetown.

The Playwrights emphasised the production of plays of a socialist theme, often Expressionist in form and Constructivist in setting. Their 'manifesto' also attests to an interest in American plays, repertory and experimentation.<sup>3</sup>

The NEW PLAYWRIGHTS THEATRE will produce only American plays. Four Spring productions are announced on the present program. Eight more plays will be introduced into the repertory during the season of

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1. NYPL.TC.
  2. Enlarged detail of Pictorial Map of New York City (New York, 1928). Harvard Map Collection.
  3. 'The New Playwrights' Theatre', Leaflet [February, 1927]. NYPL.TC.; and 'The Revolt in Fifty-Second Street', New York Times, February 27, 1927.

1927-1928. Each play will be retained on the program as long as there is an audience for it.

The active management is in the hands of five working playwrights, in the interest of their own and the work of other writers. We aim to serve the new author. We are in search of creative material. The entire output of the five playwright-directors (with the exception of previous contracts) is reserved to this theatre. We advocate no 'ism', but are not afraid of experimentation, and we pledge our efforts to the avoidance of dullness and aestheticism.

We are out to get audience support. We cannot exist without it.

Theories, iron, dynasties, song, man, ships eventually come to an end. But they must not be forgotten. Therefore histories and records fill our libraries and museums. Archeologists are digging up everything in sight, searching for mementoes of the past. Scientists are roaming over valleys and mountains recording the songs, manners and superstitions of dying peoples. The past was great, rich, fertile; its heritage incalculable. It must be preserved.

The true artist never derides or rejects this heritage and pays homage to its creators on every occasion. He recognizes no missing link in the evolution of art. But he does feel that the present is as important as the past - even more so - for he knows full well that if the artist of the ages gone by had sat musing on and imitating the things that had come and gone before him without watching faithfully his own age, the gaps in the history of creative art would surely be greater than they seem to us now.

The contemporary spirit of the theatre - along with other artists - does not hide himself in a corner, hoping against hope for the return of the glories, color and pageant of the past. He stands shoulder to shoulder with the mentors of this our age; the Einsteins, Goethals, Curies, Michelsons, Edisons. He is their historian, their toastmaster and very often their clown. He uses the clay and the model that they have ready for him. He accepts their nuts, bolts, cranes; he listens to the tunes played by their acetylene torches cutting through steel, rock, bone; he trembles as the earth trembles when their shoring engines shriek and pound away. Does the earth welcome it? Probably no more than man. Protest. Clench your fists. Try to trip



the paraders. Throw rotten eggs at the dynamo. The show will go on. We are in the presence of the present.

Since its incipency, the theatre has always been an avocative institution - it certainly never was passive or negative. In Greece, in the Middle Ages, during the French and more recent Russian revolutions, the stage was dressed and ready, like a country bride to receive the banners, the victors, the rank and file with whatever trappings or notions - all without malice. And so today. There is nothing absolute about our theatre. We are always ready to change the cloak if it shows any sign of fading. We visualize a theatre where the spirit, the movement, the music of this age is carried on, accentuated, amplified, crystallized. A theatre which shocks, terrifies, matches wits with the audience; whose emotion runs parallel with those of the flapper, the tabloids, the steam shovel, the radio, the screeching advertisements, the Candy Kid's escapades; where we may listen to the engine of a three-ton truck playing obbligato to a chorus of negroes singing unforgettable spirituals or cater to an audience that, after sitting through two hours of Handel or Bach, dashes out to round out the day drinking synthetic gin and twisting its body at the command of a gang of musical morons. In all, a theatre which is as drunken, as barbaric, as clangorous as our age; withal permitting a sense of irony to dull the too sharp edge and observing a sense of decorum even when the shades are up. Or a theatre which, for want of a better name, may be called a therapeutic, where the lights, the music and the steps are soft and subdued; a shock-absorber under every seat; within the walls of which the harrowed and hunted citizen may be nursed and transformed into a child of the morning, and at the final curtain sent away ready to be mauled and battered once more.

Both such theatres are necessary and inevitable. The policy of ours is neither carved in stone nor written in water; it is elastic and arbitrary. Tomorrow we may sweep out what we are attempting today, but in doing so, we'll be careful not to sweep out the audience too.

The above was written by Em Jo Basshe, playwright, Russian immigrant, archetypal Bohemian and the most prominent administrator of the New Playwrights' Theatre.

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## CHAPTER IV

### NON-COMMERICALISM, PART I

They do not pay big cash profits, but give great indirect benefit, raising the culture of the country through the main travelled roads of the theatre. They do not present productions costing a million dollars, but create new forms which will influence the world.

Richard Boleslavsky, 'The Laboratory Theatre', Theatre Arts Magazine (July, 1923), p.245.

The organization and management of American theatre around the turn of the century was becoming increasingly commercialized.<sup>1</sup> In opposition, or as an alternative, the Art Theatre movement was a reaction. In its ideals it declared itself positively 'non-commercial'.

Some critics have pointed to the contradiction in the term as applied to the theatre. J. Brooks Atkinson said for example that such theatres were impossible: they 'are bound to fail. When they succeed, they are commercial'.<sup>2</sup> But this is to define 'non-commercialism' too narrowly. If non-commercial theatre cannot make money, then Atkinson's observation is true. But it is my intention to define the term in a broader sense which allows profits in a non-commercial organization, provided that profit-making is not the main purpose of the organization. Thus the economist Alfred L. Bernheim defined the non-commercial theatre as 'not stimulated by the expectation of profit' and having 'love of the theatre as its central motive power'.<sup>3</sup>

Non-commercialism so defined was a fundamental characteristic of all the Art Theatres. It was both an ideal worthy of pursuit for its own sake and a prerequisite to the harmony of their other ideals, most of which could not have functioned in a commercial

1. See above, Chapter II, pp.12ff.

2. New York Times, April 12, 1931.

3. The Business of the Theatre: 1750-1932 (New York, 1932), p.104.



atmosphere. It manifested itself in a number of ways: in statements critical of commercial motives, in efforts to establish systems of endowment (which would free the organization from dependence on income derived from the box-office, and from the need to produce plays to please the public) and in the pursuit of policies of an essentially uneconomic nature (policies which aimed for example at producing plays of an advanced or unusual type).

The ten Art Theatres however were not isolated examples of alternatives or opposition to the commercial theatre. They were central to a wider movement towards non-commercialism in the theatre which expressed itself in similar ways. Before the advent of the New Theatre, many critics were discussing the different possible forms of theatre endowment. Some, like Brander Matthews, preferred the idea of government subsidy.<sup>1</sup> But most advocates of the endowment principle, rightly, did not regard government help as imminent and feared the interference of such an external force.<sup>2</sup> Allen Davenport in Stage Affairs in America Today for example argued

The establishment and stable maintenance of a national or municipal theatre in this country is unreasonable to suppose. Existing political conditions do not permit of the conduction of either for the best desired purposes of the drama.<sup>3</sup>

Davenport and others endorsed the merits of private philanthropy. Frederic Harrison in the Forum observed the support wealthy

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1. 'The Question of the Theatre', North American Review (March, 1902), p.401.
  2. See J.L. Ford, 'The Free Theatre', Munsey's Magazine (October, 1902), p. 148.
  3. 'The New Theatre', in Stage Affairs in America Today (Boston, 1907).

individuals gave to libraries, museums, parks, galleries and colleges and asked, 'Why does not one of these men found a theatre and endow it for a given period or run a theatre on a grand scale out of his own purse?'<sup>1</sup> Still others advocated the formation of theatre clubs where small enrolment fees, spread across a large membership, might provide the necessary endowment. W.M. Payne in his article on 'The Endowed Theatre' expressed the belief that thousands of people would respond if such organizations existed.<sup>2</sup> In all, there were many critics of differing persuasions who agreed with Norman Hapgood's general prescription for 'The Upbuilding of the Theatre': 'There is no road to the best but endowment'.<sup>3</sup>

Working examples of endowment were never as plentiful as its advocates, especially in the sphere of government subsidy. But the move towards government subsidy, which culminated in the Federal Theatre project of the 1930s, was beginning with J.I.C. Clarke's attempt to secure a Congressional appropriation for his National Art Theatre in 1904.<sup>4</sup> (Since then, of course,

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1. 'The Revival of the Drama' (October, 1893), p.193; cf. G.P. Baker, Ainslee's Magazine (February, 1902).
  2. Dial (May, 1899), p.297; cf. Heinrich Conreid in M.J. Moses, The Life of Heinrich Conreid (New York, 1916), p.90.
  3. Atlantic Monthly (March, 1899), p.420; and see E. Markham, 'A National Theatre for America', Arena (July, 1904), pp.52-53; T.R. Sullivan, 'A Standard Theatre', Atlantic Monthly (May, 1895), p.687; and H. Modjeska, 'Endowed Theatre and the American Stage', Forum (November, 1892), p.420.
  4. See H. Flanagan, Arena (New York, 1940); and M. Schwartz, 'Theatre Is a Democracy', New York Times, December 1, 1940.

it has realized ever increasing grants from municipalities, States' offices and, after 1965, Federal funds in the National Endowment programme.)<sup>1</sup> Private endowment was far more significant before the Art Theatre era, although on a modest scale, enabling certain groups or individuals to work in worthwhile, if financially unrewarding, ways. In 1890, James A. Hearne produced his experimental Margaret Fleming in Lynn, Massachusetts, as a privately financed venture with little hope of profit. ('Certainly no manager would present it with the expectation of making money out of it',<sup>2</sup> wrote the reviewer James A. Ford.) In the early 1900s, Miss A. Minnie Herts and Mrs. Emma Fry supported dramatic work in connection with the Educational Alliance. Twenty trustees guaranteed the New Theatre in Chicago in 1906. By these same means, a number of prominent foreign artists visited America during the Art Theatre era: Pavlova and Mordkin (1910), the Ballets Russes (1915-1916; 1916-1917), Max Reinhardt (1923; 1928) and the Habima Players (1927-1931). In 1912, Professor George Pierce Baker founded the 47 Workshop in Cambridge, Massachusetts, with a guarantee from former members of

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1. 'Uncle Sam for the Arts', Newsweek (March 26, 1973), p.55.

2. Lippincott's (December, 1891).



his classes. The organization operated with annual gifts and individually endowed productions.<sup>1</sup> Private subsidy supported such theatres as the Bramhall Playhouse (1915) and the Arts and Crafts Theatre, Detroit (1916). And in the absence of government subsidy the critics continued to argue strongly in favour of these gifts.<sup>2</sup> (The total amount contributed from this source in 1964 amounted to \$12,000,000,000, a sum which is still far in excess of government subsidy.)<sup>3</sup>

More important in practice than either government or private subsidy was the 'endowment' of the subscription-based systems.<sup>4</sup> By buying a seat in advance for a number of different plays, sometimes at a discount, the subscribers provided a substantial sum at the beginning of the season. A theatre adopting this system could therefore budget production expenses in relation to this received income with some precision. The advertisement and sale of subscriptions as a means to support a theatre, whether the subscriber took up his tickets or not, and the loyalty to a theatre which subscribing might involve constituted a valuable endowment. I shall discuss subscriptions in greater detail in Chapter VI, below, but some examples are appropriate here. Before the Art

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1. See letter from G. Baker to Mary Ware, January 26, 1916. H.TC.
  2. See S. Cheney, The Art Theatre (New York, 1925), pp.245ff.; and Vladimir Nemirovitch Danchenko, New York Times, January 20, 1926.
  3. W. Baumol and W. Bowen, The Performing Arts: The Economic Dilemma (New York, 1966), p.306.
  4. See T. Hatlen, 'The Independent Theatre Movement in New York: 1890-1900', TS, p.5. NYPL.TC.

Theatre era, in 1891, H.B. McDowell had introduced the system to the New York Theatre of Arts and Letters which undertook to underwrite experimental plays. It was used by the Standard Company of Actors in 1895 and John Blair's company of 1899. The year after the opening of the New Theatre the Drama League was founded, followed by the New York Stage Society (1912) and the Drama Society (1913), general membership organizations which normally sought to provide audiences for worthy, failing plays in the commercial theatre but occasionally produced their own plays. From the Irving Place Theatre (1918) of Maurice Schwartz to the present day Metropolitan Opera House, subscription systems have continued to flourish.

The normal purpose of seeking financial security in these ways, in the professional theatre, was to enable groups to produce plays beyond the general public's taste and to experiment freely. It provided the only possible financial base for 'minority' drama. To pick out only one example of this connection: the production of plays serving socialist ideals was for many years almost always subsidized by close membership groups. Subscriptions provided the basis for Julius Hopp's Pioneer Theatre of 1908, which was to produce dramas 'too unprofitable for the commercial stage'.<sup>1</sup> The same was true of the

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1. Julius Hopp, Socialist Theatre (March, 1908).

subsequent Labor Guild (1922), the Arbeiter Teater Farband (1925) and the Workers' Drama League (1926).

The founding ideology of the ten Art Theatres represents an interesting summary of contemporary response to the profit motive and unadventurous artistic policy of the commercial theatre. If we lay side-by-side their relevant ideological representations, we find that they all rejected the priority of commercial motivation in favour of service to artistic ideals. The American Laboratory Theatre stated that it would 'not pay big cash profits, but give great indirect benefits, raising the culture of the country through the main travelled road of the theatre'. It would - 'not present productions costing a million dollars, but create new forms which will influence the world'.<sup>1</sup> The Civic Repertory Theatre asked that 'the theatre should be an instrument for giving, not a machinery for getting'. 'It does not compete, nor does it want to compete, with the Broadway theatres. It is not in any sense a commercial venture.' At the same time it was to produce 'the most worthwhile American and European plays'.<sup>1</sup> In the same way, the Jewish Art Theatre was founded primarily to be 'a fine artistic enterprise ... its aims are to place the

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1. See above, Chapter III.



Jewish Theatre on a level with the best that is done on the non-Jewish stage'.<sup>1</sup> That the 'best' of the non-Jewish stage was in accord with the non-commercial rather than the commercial stage is clear from the invocation of Stanislavsky: 'The new theatre will attempt to present not only the best Yiddish drama, but also translations of "foreign" plays after the fashion of the Moscow Art Theatre'.<sup>2</sup> At the Little Theatre Winthrop Ames was worried that his prices could not be lower: 'I should be sorry indeed to feel that the Little Theatre is only for those of big pocket books',<sup>1</sup> and later he added 'if I can break even, I'll be satisfied'.<sup>3</sup> He characterized his artistic policy as providing 'entertainment for intelligent people',<sup>1</sup> in which 'unusual plays' would feature. The Neighborhood Playhouse stressed its community function above all 'where the traditions of the neighborhood can find artistic expression, where anyone with special gifts can contribute his talent'.<sup>1</sup> Later the Playhouse affirmed that it was

dependent upon those who participate in the organization and testify through their service a belief in a non-commercial standard in salary ... all of us working at the Playhouse are shareholders in an idea, maintained, as vital ideas are, through a common faith [and] indifference to personal gain.<sup>4</sup>

The play-policy was to concern itself with 'interesting productions'

1. See above, Chapter III.
2. 'H.P.S.', 'The Jewish Art Theatre', Nation (September 6, 1919).
3. C. Darnton, 'How to Make a Theatre Pay when it Only Has 299 Seats', New York World, March 16, 1912.
4. Letter [From Alice Lewisohn] to Alexander Woolcott [October, 1925], NYPL.TC.

and 'many plays new to New York audiences - in some instances by unknown American playwrights'.<sup>1</sup> The New Playwrights' Theatre committed itself to serve the cause of socialism, although this intention was carefully suppressed at first, in the interests of retaining the maximum public sympathy. In recognizing two distinct types of drama and theatre however, one which 'shocks, terrifies, matches wits with the audience' etc. and one which 'may be called theraputic',<sup>1</sup> the Playwrights declared their allegiance to the former, uncommon non-commercial type. Although the founders of the New Theatre believed that their organization might realize profits, their purpose was 'devoted to the cause of Art only, and not in any way to the cause of profit'. They decided to use any profits which did accrue, over the modest 5% per year on investment, to endow the theatre, create a pension fund for the actors and found a drama school. Their plays would be distinguished by 'genuine' and 'acknowledged merit'.<sup>1</sup> At the Provincetown, the director George Cram Cook had long been of the opinion that 'either conscious or unconscious adapting of one's work to what it will mean in money was as a blight'.<sup>2</sup> The announcement of the first New York season, like that of the American Laboratory Theatre, stressed the value of a stage of 'extremely limited resources', and 'what money and energy they had went into improving the quality of the productions'.<sup>3</sup> Plays

1. See above, Chapter III.

2. S. Glaspell, The Road to the Temple (New York, 1927), p.120.

3. H. Deutsch and S. Hanau, The Provincetown: A Story of the Theatre (1931, rpt. New York, 1959), p.8.

could be produced 'without submitting to the commercial manager's interpretation of public taste'.<sup>1</sup> Like the New Playwrights, the Theatre Guild carefully stated its aims in order not to alienate its potential audience. But the mention of 'profits',<sup>1</sup> and the statement elsewhere that 'the successful ... theatre must be commercial',<sup>2</sup> must be seen in the context of the Guild's attempt in 1919 to disassociate itself from 'little theatres' of various kinds, some of which possessed social exclusiveness, small minority appeal and amateur standards and against which a large proportion of the New York theatre-goers were frankly prejudiced in an unfavourable way. The Guild stressed that it would try 'to produce plays on a higher plane of theatrical artistry',<sup>1</sup> than the commercial theatres and elsewhere gave out that 'the Theatre Guild was not established with an idea of making money .... just as long as the theatre is self-supporting'.<sup>3</sup> It was at least an 'enterprise with its eye upon the production first and the profits afterwards, [which] allows itself leeway in the direction of interesting experiments'.<sup>4</sup> The Washington Square Players, from whom the Guild derived, stated directly:

We believe that hard work and perseverance, coupled with ability and the absence of purely commercial considerations, may result in the birth and growth of an artistic theatre in this country.<sup>1</sup>

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1. See above, Chapter III.
  2. R. Peters in 'Actors Managing Their Own Productions', Literary Digest (November 1, 1919).
  3. 'Their Idea of a Wonderful Time', April, 1919. Clipping, NYPL.TC.
  4. R. Peters in 'Actors Managing Their Own Productions', Literary Digest (November 1, 1919).



Here too there would be plays 'which have been ignored by the commercial managers'.<sup>1</sup>

In contrast to the commercial theatre therefore, the Art Theatres expressed a general indifference to private gain. Some organizations, like the Little Theatre, the New Playwrights' Theatre, the New Theatre and the Theatre Guild with relatively large resources in approximately the same geographical area as the commercial theatre were particularly concerned to offset some of their expenses; others like the Civic Repertory Theatre were less concerned: none was looking for profits for their own sake. Some theatres like the Theatre Guild were prepared to spend considerable sums in staging plays, others like the American Laboratory Theatre and the Provincetown preferred stages of simple resources. Whatever the scale on which these enterprises were run, service to artistic ideals (whether to plays, methods of production or types of theatre building) replaced the profit motive.

Turning now to the ways in which these ideas were put into practice, we find that the Art Theatres used a number of different financing systems to avoid the pressure of the simple

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1. See above, Chapter III.

box-office income and its correlative, the commercial play.<sup>1</sup> They used four identifiable types at the beginning of their operations: capital owned by the individual or group creating the ideology; capital 'borrowed' by the individual or group from a private source, or limited number of private sources; capital 'borrowed' from both a private source and from the general audience; and capital 'borrowed' from the audience alone. It is not my intention to judge whether a particular system was more or less appropriate to any theatre, even with the benefit of hindsight, but I shall try to point out some of the strengths and weaknesses of some of the theatres in describing how they organized their finances.

For Winthrop Ames, the Little Theatre was an intensely personal venture. Ames provided the finances and presided over general policy decisions. His first aim was to introduce theatregoers to unusual and substantial plays in an intimate atmosphere. From the first he admitted that profits were not a motive force. 'I don't think it's ever going to make me rich'.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, he wanted as far as possible to minimize box-office prices: 'the moment I can afford to do so, I shall reduce the price of seats to \$1.00 for special performances'.<sup>3</sup>

1. In a subsequent chapter, X, below, I will discuss the theatres' economic position in practice.
2. C. Darnton, 'How to Make a Theatre Pay When It Only Has 299 Seats', New York World, March 16, 1912.
3. Ibid.

It was these policies which prompted the critic Ludwig Lewisohn to observe that

In its ideals and intentions, this is quite easily the noblest theatrical enterprise existing among us. It stands aloof from all the pressures of commerce.<sup>1</sup>

In March 1912 in his article 'How to Make a Theatre Pay When It Only Has 299 Seats', Charles Darnton asked Ames whether all the money invested in the Little Theatre was his own. He replied, 'Yes ... there is not another dollar back of it'.<sup>2</sup> It is possible to make some estimate of the nature of Ames' actual liabilities. Excluding land, the theatre building cost \$181,500.<sup>3</sup> When the theatre was built the organization incorporated with capital of \$10,000. (Co-directors were named as Edward E. Lyons and George Foster Platt<sup>4</sup> but there is no evidence that either associate contributed any part of the capital.) Fixed running costs of the building, composed of rent, permanent staff salaries, insurance, maintenance, basic heating and lighting and administrative expenses but excluding all production expenses, were probably somewhere in the region of \$1,500 per week.<sup>5</sup> Ames hoped the box-office would offset most costs. But he could only

1. Nation (December 13, 1919).
2. New York World, March 16, 1912.
3. D. MacArthur, 'A Study of the Theatrical Career of Winthrop Ames: 1904-1929', Diss. Ohio State University 1962, p.207.
4. New York Telegraph, February 12, 1912. Clipping, NYPL.TC.
5. My calculations on the basis of figures available for the Booth Theatre on 45th. Street, another small theatre administered by Ames during the same period: 'The Booth Theatre: Fixed Charges', TS, 1915-16. NYPL.TC.



sell two hundred and ninety-nine seats at any performance. Therefore, with tickets priced at \$2.50, up to twelve performances each week and capacity at every performance, he could only receive a weekly maximum of \$9,000. In practice he might earn nearer \$5,000.<sup>1</sup> The resulting margin of between \$3,000 and \$4,000 per week to cover production expenses in the professional theatre was almost certainly too small. Within this framework there was very little room for manoeuvre. There was very little Ames could do to minimize his losses. He might lower production investment to as little as \$2,693.06,<sup>2</sup> but only at the risk of lowering his artistic standards. He might raise his ticket prices, but only at the risk of arousing the prevailing wave of anti-snobbery in the theatre which he had good cause to fear,<sup>3</sup> since it had threatened the work of the New Theatre from which Ames had so recently come.

It was an expensive project for an individual to support even though Ames owned considerable private wealth. It was financially sound so long as he was personally prepared to continue to sustain the losses which pursuit of his ideal entailed. But the system had inherent weaknesses. Unless Ames could find a successor to sustain the same losses for the

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1. Cf. T.H. Dickinson, 'The Little Theatre', in The Insurgent Theatre (New York, 1917).
  2. 'Production in New York Season 1911-1912', TS, 1912. NYPL.TC.
  3. When it was believed that Ames' prices were to be \$3.50, a cartoon appeared in the New York Times (February 18, 1912) showing a queue of theatregoers at the Little Theatre in evening dress with the ticket price written in place of each face.

sake of an ideal which was not his own, the life of the theatre and of the ideal was certainly limited to that of its founder. More important, it was certainly limited to the continuing enthusiasm of its founder. In the case of Winthrop Ames, this interest in policies which the Little Theatre translated into practice was firmly held but not deep-rooted and might therefore be regarded as unsettled. For example, Ames had no experience of working with an intimate theatre. Until 1907 it had been his intention to conduct his Castle Square Theatre in Boston on a larger scale not a smaller.<sup>1</sup> At the New Theatre between 1908 and 1911 he operated in one of the largest, most sophisticated theatres in the country. He gained a knowledge of intimate houses only by visiting European theatres privately in 1907.<sup>2</sup> Thus he was investing heavily in an idea of theoretical rather than practical evolution. In these circumstances there were likely to be difficulties of a more serious nature than if either he had invested on a more modest scale, or if he had acquired some practical experience. And these difficulties were liable to be more oppressive to an individual providing both the policies and the financial backing

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1. See 'The New Theatre Manager', Literary Digest (August 8, 1908).
  2. See J.H. Jennings, 'Winthrop Ames' Notes for the Perfect Theatre', Educational Theatre Journal (March, 1960), pp.9 ff.

than to an experienced executive without the personal financial burden.

At the Neighborhood Playhouse the Lewisohn sisters established a similar financial system. Alice and Irene Lewisohn together provided most of the original funds and exerted the most powerful influence over policy. But here experience played a much more important part in setting the financial system on a sounder basis. Financing and organization developed from small beginnings and were adjusted according to need.

The origins of the Neighborhood Playhouse can be traced to an amateur group called the Festival Dancers. The Dancers formed in 1907 at the Henry Street Settlement, an East Side social welfare centre providing for the mainly Jewish immigrants in that area. It was not surprising that such a centre, concerning itself with many social needs, should have developed a cultural aspect. Many Jewish immigrants

yearned for the yeshiva, the synagogue, the home circles, even the chassidic groups. For us, everything here appeared prosaic: at dawn, to the shop, at night, back from the shop. Young people confided to each other their lonesomeness, their need for their folkways ... a cultural centre perhaps.<sup>1</sup>

Whether individuals reacted against assimilation in an effort to

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1. S. Aldheit, in D.F. Lifson, 'A History of the Yiddish Art Theatre Movement in New York: 1918-1940', Diss. New York University 1963, p.78.



preserve a group identity, or whether they looked for the opportunity to link their cultural experience with that of the adopted land, cultural centres provided for a real need. The Henry Street Settlement, assisting primarily in the process of assimilation, supported the Dancers in their many representations of 'the ideal of universal brotherhood'.<sup>1</sup> The Settlement contributed very little in the way of expenses for costumes and small properties. For five years the Dancers performed in the street or in the gymnasium and not until after 1912 did the Settlement arrange the periodic rental of a local auditorium, Clinton Hall.<sup>2</sup> Clearly they intended to involve the greatest number of participants with the minimum outlay of money. The Channakah Festival of 1909, for example, employed up to a hundred people, almost all amateurs and mostly children, at a cost of \$238.47.<sup>3</sup>

In 1912 the Lewisohns, who were already associated with the social work of the Settlement, accepted an invitation to form a drama club to work in the same spirit as the Dancers. For two years they worked with amateurs, giving occasional performances at Clinton Hall under the name of the Neighborhood Players. Their audience was favourable and there developed among the Players an enthusiasm and 'an esprit de corps that seemed destined to continue'.<sup>4</sup> But the inadequacy of Clinton Hall stood in the

1. 'Jeptha's Daughter Found', TS, p.3. NYPL.TC.

2. See 'The Neighborhood Playhouse', Leaflet, 1924-25. NYPL.TC.

3. 'Expenditures for Channakah Festival', TS, January, 1909. NYPL.TC.

4. A. (Lewisohn) Crowley, The Neighborhood Playhouse: Leaves from a Theatre Scrapbook (New York, 1959), p.33.

way of further progress. There appeared to be no alternative buildings and the Settlement had not the means to improve any. It was then that the Lewisochns decided to build a theatre for the Players out of their own resources. Including land, the cost was \$150,000.<sup>1</sup>

Some of the same weakness of the unification of financial backer and policy-maker which characterized the Little Theatre is evident here. If the enterprise was to continue it depended on the combined enthusiasm and economic well-being of a single, perhaps capricious, source. But this weakness was tempered by several conditions. The gift of the theatre did not necessarily invest the Lewisochns with the almost total control which Winthrop Ames enjoyed. Although the Lewisochns exercised a predominant influence over policy, a more co-operative situation existed because of the nature of Jewish philanthropy. Such philanthropy, which had established the Settlement itself in 1893, was

the Judaic thing to do ... 'tsdoke' - giving; a form of spiritually accented charity that did not rob the receiver of his dignity.<sup>2</sup>

Co-operation with the theatre members reduced the element of capriciousness. More significant, provision of the theatre was in direct fulfilment of a need deriving from an established organization and proven policies:

It was because many of the same group who had taken part in the first Festival in the Henry Street Settlement

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1. T.H. Dickinson, 'The Neighborhood Playhouse', in Insurgent Theatre (New York, 1917).
  2. H. Roskolenko, The Time that Was Then (New York, 1971), pp.209ff.

gymnasium had demonstrated their belief and enthusiasm for art expression in the drama through years of patient service and arduous training and of a steadily growing and appreciative audience, that the extension of the work in a really appointed theatre seemed justifiable.<sup>1</sup>

Although, like Winthrop Ames, the Lewisohns had gained many ideas from a visit to European theatres in 1914, they travelled with distinct requirements in mind. The new theatre opened in 1915, demanding much less continuing endowment than the Little Theatre. Income and expenditure were both flexible and capable of adjustments according to need. 'Labour' was largely amateur: this reduced fixed running costs as well as production costs, all of which were met by only two performances each week with seats priced at 25 and 50 cents. The Lewisohns therefore needed to waive only the rent (the interest on their investment) to give the enterprise a good measure of economic stability.

The New Playwrights set up the second type of funding system, bringing in money from what I have termed a private source (as distinct from the founders themselves or the general audience). The Civic Repertory Theatre and the American Laboratory Theatre adopted the same system. Although these last two organizations would prove that the system could be relatively sound, the

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1. 'Jephtha's Daughter Found', TS, p.2. NYPL.TC.



New Playwrights soon found themselves in difficulties. Their weakness had been Ames' weakness: not only did the five founding members have little experience of the work in which they were about to engage, they had little experience of any theatre organization. Of the five, Em Jo Basshe had most experience, having been associated with the Provincetown. But his only play in Macdougall Street had been Adam Solitaire (1925); his other work had consisted of 'helping out backstage',<sup>1</sup> not helping run the organization. John Howard Lawson had had three plays produced: Roger Bloomer (1923), Processional (1925, by the Theatre Guild) and Nirvana (1926), but he had been involved with the producing side of only one, organizing the transfer of Roger Bloomer to the Greenwich Village Theatre. Michael Gold had founded the short-lived Workers' Theatre with Lawson and John Dos Passos and produced only his own Strike (1926). Two of his plays, Ivan's Homecoming and Down the Airshaft had appeared at the Provincetown in 1917 but his experience was mainly in the world of journalism. John Dos Passos had seen his The Moon Is a Gong produced in 1925-26; but he had no thorough producing experience beyond some set-designing. Francis Edwards Faragoh had not yet even seen any of his own plays produced. The Theatre Guild had produced his translation of Ferenc Molnar's The Glass Slipper in 1925 but his main acquaintance with the management of a theatre was as drama critic for Pearson's

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1. G.A. Knox and H.M. Stahl, Dos Passos and the Revolting Playwrights (Uppsala, 1964), p.59.

Magazine. These were primarily writers of plays, looking for somewhere to have them produced.

The Workers' Theatre had brought together Gold, Lawson and Dos Passos.<sup>1</sup> Basshe and Faragoh moved in the same circles, drawn by their interest in writing plays, their commitment to socialist principles and the particular inspiration of the International Theatre Exposition of 1926 which had illustrated some of the most advanced staging techniques of Europe and America.<sup>2</sup> It is likely that their association would have remained informal had it not been for the unexpected interest of the wealthy city banker and arts devotee Otto Kahn. Both Gold and Basshe had previously been in contact with Kahn, looking for support for their individual writing ambitions and they had interested him, Basshe with his Adam Solitaire and Gold with his Fiesta and Hoboken Blues. Gold met him in 1926:

Well what Mr. Kahn suggested at our first interview was that he liked my plays but thought that New York needed a new theatre to produce such plays. I agreed with him. So he said 'Why don't you organize such a theatre? I'll help you.' So I said 'All right, thanks, I will' and staggered into the street.<sup>3</sup>

Gold, Basshe, Lawson, Dos Passos and Faragoh drew up the financial arrangements with Kahn in January 1927. Lack of any clear idea of the kind of theatre or organization they needed was another

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1. See 'Workers to Stage "Strike"', New York Times, May 25, 1926. Clipping, NYPL.TC.
  2. See M. Valgema, 'Lawson and the Pinwheel Controversy', Educational Theatre Journal (March, 1968), p.10.
  3. M. Matz, The Many Lives of Otto Kahn (New York, 1963), p.140.



unsettling element. They discussed the purchase of a movie theatre and offices at 69, East Houston Street which would have cost between \$150,000 and \$175,000 plus \$13,000 for alterations 'if only sheer necessities are installed'.<sup>1</sup> On a smaller scale, they considered a property at 441, East 19th. Street, seating perhaps as few as two hundred and fifty, at a cost of about \$30,000.<sup>2</sup> After some indecision they hurriedly leased the 52nd. Street Theatre, a house of modest size on the fringes of the theatre district, to get to work before the end of the 1926-27 season.

The size of the initial investment may also have contributed to the instability. In the circumstances it was extravagant. As well as underwriting the lease, Kahn paid \$15,000 towards production expenses with the promise of further aid.<sup>3</sup> The Playwrights were evidently concerned to strengthen their financial base by broadening the source of endowment from the vulnerable, single contributor. By offering Sustaining Memberships at \$100 each they appealed to the public for support, but I have found no evidence how many, if any, were bought. They were forced to rely on the box-office to offset as much expense as possible. Probably the Playwrights hoped to repay at least a little of Kahn's investment since they carried his financial assistance on their books as loans at 5%. But it was unlikely

1. G.A. Knox and H.M. Stahl, *Dos Passos and the Revolting Playwrights* (Uppsala, 1964), p.211.
2. Ibid, p.213.
3. M. Goldstein, 'Theatrical Insurgency in Pre-Depression America', *Theatre Survey*, 2 (1961), pp.35ff.



that alternative endowments and box-office receipts could introduce greater security when they began to produce experimental and politically slanted plays to a lavish professional standard. Further, the Playwrights were moved more by a desire to attract the working man than by commercial motives: they advertised 'there will be seats as low as 50 cents'.<sup>1</sup> Their position was precarious from the first.

The Civic Repertory Theatre and the American Laboratory Theatre avoided much of the possible instability resulting from lack of experience, costly investment at an early stage and a single source of endowment. Eva Le Gallienne, founder of the Civic Repertory, had had extremely wide theatrical experience in Europe and in America both as an actress and producer. As an actress for example, while under contract to the Shubert organization, she had arranged private rehearsals for actors like herself who wished to experiment in ensemble techniques, the techniques of working together as a harmonious group rather than in a subordinate relationship with a star. She had no wish to exploit this work commercially. Experiment was far more important. When businessmen began to take an interest, she

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1. M. Gold, 'White Hope of American Drama', March 1, 1927. Clipping, NYPL.TC.

abandoned the work.<sup>1</sup> As an actress in Arthur Rowe's Afternoon Theatre (which dedicated itself to producing little-performed classic plays) she experienced at close quarters the problem of raising money for idealistic purposes and began to think of founding her own theatre. In 1925, she raised enough money to finance special matinées of The Master Builder. She raised a little more to produce John Gabriel Borkman with the same cast in a different theatre. When they succeeded individually she was able to bring them together and to tour them in repertory. She experimented with popular prices at the same time. Although to do so in New York was quite difficult because most theatre managers were afraid to 'vulgarize' their houses' reputations, she succeeded in introducing a morning show with a \$1.50 top.<sup>2</sup>

Thus equipped, Le Gallienne was ready to take the further step of establishing popular priced repertory in a permanent theatre. This was a step requiring much heavier investment. Le Gallienne faced the same problem in 1925 as the Lewisohns in 1914. Without her own means, she raised the necessary money from other sources. Like the New Playwrights she found a ready response from Otto Kahn who agreed to guarantee the first year's rent with a sum of \$20,000. But she raised most of the money (over \$60,000) in smaller sums from a number of benefactors.<sup>3</sup> The critic Stephen Rathbun noted that contributions arrived in sums as small

1. See E. Le Gallienne, At 33 (New York, 1934), p.147.
2. Ibid, p.198.
3. New York Times, June 25, 1926. Clipping, NYPL.TC.

as \$5.00.<sup>1</sup> Le Gallienne's success as an actress gave her access to many rich people likely to contribute. She explained how she approached them:

I was predatory and ruthless. No rich person was safe in my presence. My crusading zeal was such that few people had the strength to escape my attacks on their bank accounts. If I met with resistance, I was quick to point out that since I, possessed of no fortune but my talent and industry, was willing to donate nine tenths of my earning capacity to this work, it would seem niggardly of them, secure in their steady incomes, to begrudge me a tiny fraction of their wealth. This argument amused some and impressed others and usually clinched the matter; I seldom went away empty-handed.<sup>2</sup>

It is not certain whether these funds were given or lent at first. Aline Bernstein, designer of many Civic Repertory plays, recalled that they were lent. Potential patrons were told,

I cannot promise that you will profit from your investment ... I cannot even tell you when the money will be returned. But if you believe enough in the idea, I am sure we will be able to refund what you have lent us.<sup>3</sup>

But Le Gallienne is clear that they were given freely in an uncommercial spirit: 'I never failed to make it clear that these sums were gifts, neither loans nor investments; there could be no hope of repayment or profit'.<sup>4</sup> Benefactors included

1. New York Sun, April 26, 1926.
2. With a Quiet Heart (New York, 1953), p.19.
3. Clipping, NYPL.TC.
4. With a Quiet Heart (New York, 1953), p.19.



the businessman Adolph Lewisohn, the banker Jules Bache, professor William Lyon Phelps and the author William Pritchard Eaton.<sup>1</sup>

A close relationship between financing and the needs of the organization, a small and evolving scale of investment and a spread of sources of endowment all contributed to the Civic Repertory's relatively sound total system, despite the considerable costs. The American Laboratory Theatre acquired a similar strength with their system along the same lines. As one of its catalogues was later to put it, the idealism of 'a few Americans, interested in the arts generally and creative education in particular ... inspired by the Moscow presentations here, recruited from these Russians an outstanding member as an adviser and director of future efforts and ambitions.'<sup>2</sup> The adviser and director was Richard Boleslavsky. Boleslavsky, like Le Gallienne, was experienced in most aspects of theatre arts. He had been a member of the Moscow Art Theatre between 1906 and 1915, became personal assistant to Stanislavsky and Stage Director of the First Studio of the Moscow Art Theatre. In 1922, he was of the company which brought Revue Russe to New York. The same year he

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1. A. Bernstein. Clipping, NYPL.TC.

2. 'The American Laboratory Theatre', Catalogue, 1927-28. NYPL.TC.

received sponsorship to teach acting techniques to a group of professionals at the Princess Theatre (among whom were Jacob Ben-Ami, actor at the Jewish Art Theatre, Civic Repertory and Theatre Guild; and Winifred Lenihan, actress at the Theatre Guild). Boleslavsky's experience led him to advise and arrange for a modest financial investment geared to the needs of a slowly evolving organization. In his belief, a new group should spend only energy 'instead of beginning as most theatres would have, with vast expenditures for back-stage noises, flying birds and dancing waves, for musical instruments and gorgeous silken effects and expensive furnishings.'<sup>1</sup> The drama enthusiast Mrs. Herbert Stockton provided an immediate \$500.<sup>2</sup> Other funds came from a modest number of Member-Founders who purchased \$100 shares. Member-Collaborators, anybody hired by the Laboratory, agreed to contribute 10% of their wages to a sinking fund. And a growing number of students (twenty by January 1924) each paid fees of \$10.00 per week.<sup>3</sup> Prominent Member-Founders and other donors included wives of such city men as merchant William Sloane, lawyers George Rublee and Lewis Isaacs, capitalist Seth Milliken and surgeon Walton Martin. There were also the banker Frank Vanderlip, novelist Princess Amelie Troubetzkoy and

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1. 'The American Laboratory Theatre', Catalogue, 1924-25. NYPL.TC.
  2. 'The American Laboratory Theatre', Catalogue, 1928. NYPL.TC.
  3. R. Willis, 'The American Laboratory Theatre: 1923-1930', Diss. University of Iowa 1968, p.45.

wealthy social worker Mrs. Stanley McCormick.<sup>1</sup> They provided ample starting funds to cover the small early expenses. The rent of premises at 40, East 60th. Street was \$180.00 per month, there were few staff salaries and properties, costumes and settings for teaching purposes cost very little indeed.

The financial systems of the New Theatre and the Jewish Art Theatre were even more broadly based. Although the element of endowment was still strong, here their audiences themselves contributed advance sums towards starting capital. This basis could be as sound as those relying on endowment from the private means of the founders or from other private sources, if the organizers were sufficiently experienced in economic management and the initial investment was restrained by and related to the needs of the theatre. But it could be weak, as in the case of the New Theatre, when inexperience combined with extravagance.

The twenty-three founders of the New Theatre were men of business not men of the theatre. They included the capitalists William K. Vanderbilt, Harry Whitney, Hamilton Twombly, James H. Hyde, Clarence Mackay, George J. Gould, John Jacob Astor, the bankers J. Pierpoint Morgan, James Stillman, Otto Kahn, Charles T. Barney, August Belmont, the lawyer Paul D. Cravath and the author

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1. 'The American Laboratory Theatre', Catalogue, 1927-28. NYPL.TC.



Eliot Gregory. The sources of their inspiration were the 'Théâtre Français' and the 'Opéra Comique' without the benefit of intimate knowledge of either. Heinrich Conreid, the experienced and capable originator of the scheme, became ill and left little guidance for those who carried forward his ideas. These were the businessmen Charles T. Barney, James Henry Smith, Otto Kahn and Henry Rogers Winthrop. Their director and policy-maker Winthrop Ames had no experience of such a major undertaking. In the prevailing atmosphere of idealism which surrounded the foundation of the theatre, all parties appeared to vie with each other in the invention of ways to spend more money. The founders bought land for \$850,000.<sup>1</sup> They opened an office in the Times Building in August 1907 at a yearly rental of \$900. The original estimates of the theatre building suggested a further cost of \$850,000 but excavation problems pushed up the price to nearly \$2,000,000. They rented a workshop and storage building for \$10,000 and equipped it for \$25,000. They paid Ames an annual salary of \$20,000.<sup>2</sup> Entering into their spirit, Ames proposed running the theatre on the repertory system, though it involved

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1. Sources for financial details are noted in J.H. Jennings, 'A History of the New Theatre in New York: 1909-1911', Diss. Stanford University 1953, pp.19ff; D. MacArthur, 'A Study of the Theatrical Career of Winthrop Ames: 1904-1929', Diss. Ohio State University 1962, pp.118-19; M. Matz, The Many Lives of Otto Kahn (New York, 1963), pp.68ff.; and see 'Chronology of Events', TS, NYPL.TC.
  2. 'Report of the Executive Committee to the Founders', Leaflet, January, 1909. NYPL.TC.

'somewhat more expense'.<sup>1</sup> He wanted 'actors of high reputation', though they 'may need to be tempted by salaries larger than they would ask of managers operating in the usual way'.<sup>2</sup> He suggested either a top French company or Eleanora Duse be imported especially for the opening.

Investment before opening amounted to about \$2,860,000. Kahn, Vanderbilt, Belmont and Mackay each contributed \$50,000 as early as 1906 to cover preliminary costs. As more 'founders' joined the group, they contributed an average of \$10,000 in exchange for limited interest bearing shares. But the greater part of the money came in advance payments from the audience. Boxes were sold in perpetuity for \$25,000. In the same way, seats in the first ten rows of the orchestra sold at \$3,750 and the first row of the balcony at \$3,000. By these means the theatre received approximately \$2,875,000.<sup>3</sup> The mortgage of the property then provided production capital.

The sheer scale of income and expenditure was therefore almost the reverse of that of the American Laboratory Theatre. Boleslavsky himself looked on this as a great weakness. The New Theatre was unsound he said because it was built 'by millionaires', without roots in the theatrical soil.<sup>4</sup> Ames

1. W. Ames, 'Prospectus', July 13, 1908, p.24. NYPL.TC.

2. Ibid, p.33.

3. Entirely my calculation based on available sources (see footnote 2, p.134). The figure would seem to be corroborated by 'The Players', Everybody's Magazine (February, 1910), in which \$3,000,000 was the figure estimated.

4. R. Boleslavsky, 'The American Laboratory Theatre', Catalogue, 1928. NYPL.TC.

found himself as he was to do later at the Little Theatre, without a system sufficiently flexible to increase income or reduce expenses. He could not reduce expenses because he had to meet the highest production standards demanded by the subscribers and he could not increase income except from private subsidy. But the New Theatre had not intended to rely upon endowment for day-to-day financing. The greater part of income was to have come from the box office. Even with maximum possible income from this quarter, with up to seven performances each week, a thirty week season, tickets up to \$2.00, the substitution of seventy extra seats in place of one tier of boxes and playing to capacity at all times, the New Theatre could hope to earn only \$751,530.00 against the \$750,705.38 of the first season's budget. It was very unlikely to play to this capacity. Ames betrayed his fears and warned the founders, 'but it seemed wisest to them at the time to continue and to keep their promises to the box owners.'<sup>1</sup>

The Jewish Art Theatre worked within a similar endowment system but here its base was more sound. Like Le Gallienne and Boleslavsky, the leading policy-maker, Jacob Ben-Ami, brought

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1. W. Ames to J.H. Hyde, in J.H. Jennings, 'A History of the New Theatre in New York: 1909-1911', Diss. Stanford University 1953, p.56.



a wide ranging experience to the foundation of the new theatre. Before arriving in America he had acted and directed in the Hirshbein Troupe, directed for the Yiddish Theatre-Lovers' Association and directed for the Fineman Art Theatre. He produced one-act plays in New York at the Neighborhood Playhouse before joining Maurice Schwartz' Irving Place Theatre in 1918. Emanuel Reicher joined Ben-Ami in the founding of the Jewish Art Theatre. He had directed for the Freie Buhne (Berlin) in 1889. In New York in 1915 he had established the People's Theatre with a subscription audience and in 1916 he too had produced a play at the Neighborhood Playhouse.

The modest beginnings of the new theatre reached back to experiments in Schwartz' theatre during the previous season. At the Irving Place there was a permanent company, subscription audiences, Yiddish plays and repertory schedule, all characteristics to be employed later by the Jewish Art Theatre. There was also an experimental play: Ben-Ami joined the company on condition that occasional experimental pieces appeared in the repertory. Schwartz agreed in principle but over a period of time made no serious effort to produce any such plays. Ben-Ami insisted that the agreement be upheld and produced Perez Hirshbein's The Abandoned Nook without Schwartz' wholehearted co-operation.<sup>1</sup> Ben-Ami himself provided \$30.00 to cover production costs and the play

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1. See D. Lifson, 'A History of the Yiddish Art Theatre Movement in New York: 1918-1940', Diss. New York University 1963, p. 435.

went on, using old sets from the Irving Place store, on the quietest night of the week. When Schwartz remained sceptical and unco-operative, despite the success of The Abandoned Nook, Ben-Ami looked to transfer the play and as many of the company as were willing to join him to a new theatre under a more favourable management. The starting capital to procure a lease came from a businessman, Louis Schnitzer, with whom Ben-Ami had had some previous contact in earlier production ventures. They bought the Garden Theatre lease for a modest \$12,000<sup>1</sup> and raised production capital by selling subscriptions.

While there seems to be no information about the selling-price of these subscriptions they were certainly on an entirely different scale from those at the New Theatre. The New Theatre sold subscriptions on a permanent basis to raise the necessarily large preliminary sums to pay for the theatre. The Jewish Art Theatre established a continuing endowment by selling advance seats only for the coming season. Other organizations to adopt the idea of subscriptions were the Washington Square Players, the Theatre Guild and the Provincetown. Because these theatres raised capital from their audiences alone, their systems fall into a fourth category.

The Washington Square Players relied almost entirely on the

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1. Ibid, p.535.

combination of subscriptions and box-office to provide income. At first they did look beyond the audience for support: letters for example to Edward Goodman, one of the founders, clearly suggest possible sources of income (some of which other Art Theatres were to use):

There is Mrs. Sam Untermeyer at Greystone-on-the Hudson, Yonkers, New York, and Mrs. Adolph Lewisohn at 11, West 57th. Street, Mrs. A. Wagstaff in 53rd. Street c/o Henry F. Shoemaker, her father.<sup>1</sup>

And,

Has it occurred to you to call up or write to O.K. [Otto Kahn?] about all this? He has many rich connections and may be able to help out ... Do you suppose the Morgenthau might help? I'm a bit chummy with Agnes.<sup>2</sup>

But it is probable that the Washington Square Players were organized without this kind of endowment. Their beginnings were on an extremely small scale and their development out of the club-life of Greenwich Village gradual, suggesting no large readily available sums of money. These characteristics of a modest, evolutionary early life indicate a potentially strong economic base, even though the founders themselves lacked real experience. Lawrence Langner, a member of the group from its earliest days, recalled how an address to the Liberal Club by the English designer Norman Wilkinson in the autumn of 1914 prompted some of those present to give a private dramatic reading.<sup>3</sup> From this there derived the Liberal Club Drama Group.

1. Letter from 'B.R.H.' to Mr. Edward Goodman, June 3, 1914. NYPL.TC.
2. Letter from 'Jo' to Ed[ward Goodman]. NYPL.TC.
3. The Magic Curtain (New York, 1952), pp.68ff.



Because of internal disagreements about the distribution of responsibilities and parts members resigned, came together with others and the Washington Square Players had begun. They did not try to translate their ideals into practice immediately by laying out large sums as the Little Theatre, the New Playwrights' Theatre and the New Theatre had done:

Our original plan was to rent a stable in Washington Square, fit it up as a theatre and give our performances there from time to time. We did get a gentleman who owns a private stable to agree to let us have it, but he backed out.<sup>1</sup>

The Players looked at other premises of the same type: 47, Washington Square; 134 Macdougall Street;<sup>2</sup> and also 139, Macdougall Street, later the home of the Provincetown and the American Laboratory Theatre. None of these proved suitable. They performed in a hired hall with admission first priced at 25 cents while they extended their search. Before they found the Bandbox Theatre they had already set up a subscription system offering two seats at five different performances for \$5.00. General admissions rose to 50 cents. They transferred the system to the Bandbox early in 1915 with some one hundred subscribers on the books. Like the Little Theatre, the Bandbox had only two hundred and ninety-nine seats. But whereas the Little Theatre was always under pressure, with a system dependent on direct

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1. E. Goodman, in C. Baker, 'Wonder ...', New York Review (June 10, 1916).
  2. L. Langner, TS, November 11, 1914. NYPL.TC.

private subsidy, the Washington Square Players introduced a much stronger system based on a smaller budget and proved that such a theatre could be economically viable. Instead of establishing a full schedule, they rented the theatre for Fridays and Saturdays only at \$35.00 for the two-day week. When demand seemed to warrant, they added one extra day. Instead of beginning with full professional actors, most of the Players worked for nothing. Instead of hiring sets and costumes, they made their own. The production cost of Maeterlinck's Interior for example, was \$35.00.<sup>1</sup>

We met with surprising success from the very start. Of course we had but little expense. Everybody worked for nothing. Our receipts were sufficient to pay for the little outlay we had to make for scenery, costumes, properties, rent, lights etc., and to leave us a surplus besides.<sup>2</sup>

And they were proud of the fact that 'all this has been accomplished without one dollar of endowment from millionaire patrons, and without financial assistance of any kind'.<sup>3</sup> (In fact two Players, Lawrence Langner and Dudley Tucker, did make small private contributions to enable the group to move to the Bandbox.)<sup>4</sup> In this way one can see that the economic system and the general organization evolved together in close harmony, a viewpoint with which T.H. Dickinson seems to concur when he

1. W.P. Eaton, The Theatre Guild: The First Ten Years (New York, 1929), pp.23-24.
2. E. Goodman, in C. Baker, 'Wonder ....', New York Review June 10, 1916).
3. Ibid.
4. L. Langner, The Magic Curtain (New York, 1952), pp.91-92.

commented on the way the Players had engineered a cyclical process of putting profits back into the theatre, improving standards, earning further profits and making further improvements.<sup>1</sup>

The Washington Square Players disbanded in 1918 for a number of reasons but their experience was not lost. Many of their members went on to found the Theatre Guild the following year. They were anxious to deny any connection with the Players, probably because they wished to conduct the new venture on a larger, professional scale and therefore to disassociate from their amateur and perhaps highbrow origins. 'The Theatre Guild' they said,

wishes to remove an impression that Helen Westley, Philip Moeller, Rollo Peters and Lawrence Langner, formerly of the Washington Square Players, are managing the new undertaking. The impression has been created that here was the old order of things under a new name, but as an actual matter of fact, the objects of the new organization and its plans are quite different from the Washington Square Players.<sup>2</sup>

But Westley, Moeller, Peters and Langner were managing the new

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1. 'The Washington Square Players', in The Insurgent Theatre (New York, 1917).
  2. Woman's Wear (April 2, 1919). Clipping, NYPL.TC.



undertaking.<sup>1</sup> Before the Players disbanded, they were introducing production of full length plays, they had professionalized, they had developed an acting company, they had moved into a Broadway theatre and they had developed a catholic repertoire of American and European plays - all characteristics of the Guild. The Players had proved the viability of a number of ideas, including financial organization based on subscription, and these were carried straight into practice by their successors. Langner was particularly happy when the First World War was ended because, he said, 'it meant ... beginning again where I had left off with the Washington Square Players.'<sup>2</sup>

Raising the necessary capital to begin where the Players had left off proved the greatest problem to the group. They hotly debated the scale of investment: Rollo Peters wanted to achieve a full professional standard from the first, Moeller gave his support to the idea of amateur beginnings. And they argued about the way in which money could be raised. Lee Simonson wanted to raise something like \$40,000 from subscriptions and large private donations before making a start.<sup>3</sup> Maurice Wertheim thought this system unsound: it was too easy to begin to rely on donations which were at best energy absorbing and at worst highly insecure. In the event, they could find no large

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1. 'New York Theatre Guild to Enter Producing Field', New York Herald, February 27, 1919.
  2. The Magic Curtain (New York, 1952), p.113.
  3. Ibid, p.118.

private donations and succeeded only in raising some \$475.00 in advance subscriptions at \$5.00 for one seat at two plays.<sup>1</sup> Private contributions from within the group brought the figure up to \$2,160.<sup>2</sup>

Where to find suitable premises posed a second problem, related to the first. As Le Gallienne found with the Civic Repertory, theatre owners were unwilling to house idealistic groups. Like Le Gallienne, the directors of the Guild looked for a theatre of a size and situation to match their moderate means but,

No one took us seriously. To the other Broadway Managers, we were rash, untried intruders. Resentful, suspicious of anything new ... No one wanted to house us.<sup>3</sup>

Daly's Theatre seemed a possibility but they could not afford it.

The Theatre Guild, like the New Playwrights, the New Theatre and the Civic Repertory Theatre, found assistance in their critical early days from Otto Kahn. Kahn did not make a donation but provided the use of a theatre which he controlled,

1. For variations, see 'The Theatre Guild', Souvenir Programme, 1928. NYPL.TC. This figure is put at \$675.00.
2. Ibid., p.119; cf. W.P. Eaton, The Theatre Guild: The First Ten Years (New York, 1929), p.32. For variations, see also R. Clarke, 'Decadence and the Theatre Guild', Billboard (January 13, 1923), p.53, in which the figure is put at \$1,500; and R. Peters, 'Old Theatre, Young Veterans', Tomorrow Magazine (March, 1944), p.45, where it is put at \$2,400. T. Helburn, in A Wayward Quest (Boston, 1960), p.70, puts the figure of private donations at \$1,100.
3. R. Peters, 'Old Theatre, Young Veterans', Tomorrow Magazine (March, 1944), p.45.

the Garrick, and gave a financial guarantee: 'when you make the rent, you will pay the rent. When you do not make it, you need not pay it.' Although the Guild always paid the rent and did not therefore make direct use of this endowment, the security enabled them to get the start they wanted. For this, Kahn was 'as near to a patron as they ever had'.<sup>1</sup>

The Guild never used the security Kahn offered to indulge extravagant fancies. Here, as with the other theatres succeeding in establishing strong economic bases, moderation prevailed in a conscious attempt to minimize expenses and organize a balancing, predictable income. On the administrative side almost everyone waived their salaries. One of the founders, Rollo Peters, remembered that only a secretary and business manager were paid before productions were actually well under way.<sup>2</sup> For the actors, a basic minimum salary of \$25.00 per week plus a profit-sharing bonus was an inventive and successful experiment to add stability to the financial system. The bonus attracted fine professional actors but protected the Guild from heavy loss if the play failed.<sup>3</sup> Several of the supporting actors were not paid at all. Imagination and hard work produced plays. They pressed into service old sets left in

1. W. Eaton, The Theatre Guild: The First Ten Years (New York, 1929), p.32. There is evidence too that a loan of \$1,000 was raised to finance the second play. See Lawrence Langner, Boston Evening Transcript, December 7, 1929.
2. 'Old Theatre, Young Veterans', Tomorrow Magazine (March, 1944), p.46.
3. See 'Real Co-operative Theatre' /December, 1919/. NYPL.TC.



the Garrick store by Jacques Copeau's company for Jacinto Benavente's Bonds of Interest. For St. John Ervine's John Ferguson, one claim put the entire cost of set and properties at \$5.20.<sup>1</sup>

Finally, the strengthening elements of evolutionary experience from modest beginnings characterized the foundation of the Provincetown, which stemmed from the same root as the Washington Square Players. As the Players came together with Lawrence Langner in reaction to the doings of the Liberal Club Drama Group, so the Provincetown formed about George Cram Cook and his wife Susan Glaspell in reaction to the Players (who had turned down Cook and Glaspell's play Suppressed Desires as 'too special').<sup>2</sup> Cook and Glaspell were in Provincetown in the summer months of 1915, soon after the foundation of the Players, along with a number of others from Greenwich Village. The Massachusetts fishing port was an attractive place for those who could afford to avoid the city at that time of year. A small group, not all Villagers, was drawn together in discussions

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1. Clipping, NYPL.TC. But see W.P. Eaton, The Theatre Guild: The First Ten Years (New York, 1929), pp.32ff., where the figure is put at \$300.
  2. W. Vilhauer, 'A History and Evaluation of the Provincetown Players', Diss. University of Iowa 1965, p.27.

about drama and there in Provincetown they gave a dramatic reading of Suppressed Desires and Neill Boyce's Constancy as spontaneously as the Players had read The Glittering Gate.<sup>1</sup> Someone who was there recalled that 'it was done in a spirit of gaiety. I don't think they thought at the moment of starting a great theatre'.<sup>2</sup>

The interest of those who were at the reading and of others who would have liked to have been there encouraged the group to look for a more favourable stage than the rooms of a private house had first provided. The artist Wilbur Daniel Steele was interested in the idea and agreed to let the group use his studio, a wooden shell of a building on the end of a short wharf which he rented from another drama enthusiast, Mary Heaton Vorse. They cleaned it out, made a stage and acted two more plays before an audience which brought its own seats or cushions. They spent only a few dollars which they had raised by a levy of \$5.00 from those of the group who could afford to pay it. In the winter of 1915-16 in New York, they produced the same plays at the Liberal Club and in a studio belonging to the artist Ira Remsen.

Back in Provincetown in 1916 they pursued their unpretentious start. They improved the wharf theatre and introduced an admission charge of 50 cents. After the first bill they introduced

1. See H. Deutsch and S. Hanau, The Provincetown: A Story of the Theatre (1931; rpt. New York, 1959).
2. Mary Heaton Vorse, in W. Vilhauer, 'A History and Evaluation of the Provincetown Players', Diss. University of Iowa 1965, p.29.

a financial system which was to be the basis of their organization for years to come. They sold eighty-seven subscriptions at \$1.00 for one seat at the remaining three bills.<sup>1</sup> They could therefore budget expenditure for six plays on the basis of \$87.00 and never fear a loss. Their most expensive play cost \$13.00.<sup>2</sup> We know that they made no profit on the season because an extra bill of revivals appeared late in the summer to raise some money for transferring their activities to New York. It made \$80.00.<sup>3</sup>

Their start in New York on a permanent basis was as relatively modest as their experience in Provincetown. Cook decided to rent the three and a half rooms at 139, Macdougall Street where the Washington Square Players had begun to make alterations two years previously.<sup>4</sup> It cost \$50.00 per month.<sup>5</sup> Alterations cost them between \$200 and \$300 which they met with a capital of about \$320 raised by the review bill and small contributions from members of

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1. S. Glaspell, The Road to the Temple (New York, 1927), p.255. For a variation, see E. Kenton, 'The Provincetown Players and the Playwrights' Theatre', Billboard (August 5, 1922), in which the figure is put at \$2.50. The former is probably nearer the truth since it correlates more exactly with known expenses and known profits etc.
  2. S. Glaspell, op.cit., p.255.
  3. Provincetown Advocate, August 30, 1916. Clipping, H.TC.
  4. S. Glaspell, The Road to the Temple (New York, 1927), p.258. For a variation, see E. Kenton, 'The Provincetown Players and the Playwrights' Theatre', Billboard (August 5, 1922) in which it is reported that the group decided.
  5. E. Kenton, op.cit. For a variation, see A. and B. Gelb, Eugene O'Neill (London, 1962), p.315, where the figure is put at \$100. The rent probably began at \$50 and later increased.



the group.<sup>1</sup> To raise more money they circularized about one thousand people and advertised subscriptions at \$5.00 for a seat at each of the ten bills scheduled. They sold perhaps sixty-four by the opening bill, but the New York Stage Society bought a large block of up to four hundred for distribution among its own members.<sup>2</sup> It seems that they also sold 'membership' as an alternative category of admission at \$4.00 for the season.<sup>3</sup> The member could then buy individual tickets when he wished at 50 cents.<sup>4</sup> Tickets were sold only to subscribers, members, or their guests, not to the general public. Run as a private club in this way, the Provincetown avoided the necessary and costly theatre licence. From these figures, I would calculate that total starting capital amounted to between \$1,800 and \$2,500. Expenses were minimized. Like the Neighborhood Playhouse and the Washington Square Players, the organization was an amateur one. Only two of the administrative staff received small salaries - the president and secretary - who shared \$42.00 a week.<sup>5</sup> In the beginning, each bill received only

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1. See H. Deutsch and S. Hanau, The Provincetown: A Story of the Theatre (1931; rpt. New York, 1959), pp.16-17.
  2. Ibid., p.19. For a variation, see E. Kenton, 'The Provincetown Players and the Playwrights' Theatre', Billboard (August 5, 1922), in which the figure is put at three hundred.
  3. 'The Provincetown Players', Minutes, September 4, 1916. NYPL.TC.
  4. W. Vilhauer, 'A History and Evaluation of the Provincetown Players', Diss. University of Iowa 1965, pp.94ff. For a variation, see H. Deutsch and S. Hanau, The Provincetown: A Story of the Theatre (1931; rpt. New York, 1959), p.22, in which the figure was put at \$1.00.
  5. 'The Provincetown Players', Minutes, October 7, 1916. NYPL.TC.

five performances and two weeks intervened between each bill.

The Art Theatres, then, used a number of different financial systems as means to express their commonly held, non-commercial ideal. But the common factors involved at their foundation, the way in which they turned to the same patrons like Otto Kahn and to the relatively uncommon subscription system, are an indication of the interest they most certainly took in each others' experiences. In Chapter X, I mean to explore these economic relationships further.

I have suggested that the Neighborhood Playhouse, the Civic Repertory Theatre, the American Laboratory Theatre, the Jewish Art Theatre, the Washington Square Players, the Theatre Guild and the Provincetown established relatively sound financial systems, with their ability to use the personal experience of founder members or to draw on a period of evolutionary development, or a combination of both, and with their modest scales of early investment. Of the different types of financial system the theatres adopted, all could be sound, from the Neighborhood Playhouse depending on the sustained interest and munificence of the Lewisohn sisters, to the Provincetown which depended on the sustained interest of a large group of activists and the loyalty of a proportion of the many subscribers. But there is little doubt that the more broadly based

systems were more stable. Here the budgets could be more accurately planned (leaving the theatre less dependent on direct endowment), the policy-makers were not necessarily themselves investors (and therefore less likely to panic in the face of losses), and the broad base removed the vulnerability of the single financial guarantor. This analysis seems to be born out in the most general terms by the individual theatres' abilities to survive the financial ravages of their non-commercial policies:

	<u>Theatre</u>	<u>Number of Production Seasons</u>
Capital owned by creators of ideology.	A. Little Theatre	4 $\frac{1}{2}$
	Neighborhood Playhouse	11 $\frac{1}{2}$
Capital borrowed by creators of ideology from private source or sources.	B. New Playwrights' Theatre	2 $\frac{1}{2}$
	Civic Repertory Theatre	6
	American Laboratory Theatre	7 $\frac{1}{2}$
Capital borrowed by creators of ideology from private sources and general audience.	C. New Theatre	2
	Jewish Art Theatre	2
Capital borrowed by creators of ideology from general audience.	D. Washington Square Players	3 $\frac{1}{2}$
	Theatre Guild	11 $\frac{1}{2}$ (to 1930)
	Provincetown	12

The average length of survival for those theatres without the characteristics attributed to relatively strong financial bases was three seasons; for those possessing these characteristics, nearly eight. And the average length of survival for the theatres adopting the broadest financial base (D) was longer than those of any other type.

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## CHAPTER V

### THE THEATRE CO-OPERATIVE

A closely knit group of creative and critical minds is capable of calling forth from the individuals who compose it richer work than they can compose in isolation.

Oliver Sayler, Boston Evening Transcript,  
May 28, 1921.

Whichever financial system the Art Theatres adopted, it provided the necessary basis to organize and develop the day-to-day management of their affairs. In opposition to the management of the commercial theatre, with its characteristic separation of executive, administrative and artistic components, its ad hoc organization, temporary combinations of artists and hurried methods of working<sup>1</sup> - all of which tended to produce plays without artistic unity - the Art Theatres looked for an alternative system founded on the integration of all workers and artists in the theatre and a permanent organization of participants who would naturally work together as a co-operative team to produce plays with more harmoniously fused artistic elements. The Art Theatre was a 'co-operative' organization, in the interests of artistic achievement. This did not mean rejecting a hierarchical structure: indeed some thought that a powerful director for example (or 'régisseur' as he was often known in the Art Theatre) was a strong unifying force. But a democratic atmosphere prevailed. All members of the theatre could contribute ideas to the creative process and here, whether they were actors, directors, designers, technical crew or even financial backers, they would be expected to interest themselves in areas other than their own speciality. Mutual commitment to ideals bound all the members together in a 'theatre co-operative'. I have taken this term describing the

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1. See Chapter II, p.26.

organizational character of the Art Theatre from a letter written by a member of the Provincetown group to one of his colleagues in 1922. The way the phrase is used suggests that the term had a wider currency at the time.<sup>1</sup>

Of course, a co-operative spirit and a flexible labour force are necessarily features of small amateur or semi-professional theatres where resources are limited and the energies of members are the chief means of support. But the Art Theatres as a group elevated co-operation to the status of an ideal as we find if we compare relevant statements from their manifestos. The American Laboratory Theatre looked to balance the creative energy of the permanent organization with the efficiency of a single powerful director. They held that, early in the process of producing a play, members as a whole should contribute their ideas: 'the real theatre is the purest form of collective creation'. Then, when their ideas came to be co-ordinated, they should submit 'to the single will of the régisseur'. Above all the co-operative spirit should prevail: 'creation requires the consecration of its members to the work of the theatre'.<sup>2</sup> At the Civic Repertory Theatre, ideals also stressed the value of a permanent organization and Le Gallienne often referred to the artistic advantages to be gained from members 'attuned to each other and their mutual task'.<sup>3</sup>

1. Letter from Charles Kuhn to Eleanor Fitzgerald, May 23, 1922. NYPL.TC. The context is quoted in full below, p.160.
2. See Chapter III.
3. 'The Open Door to the Child's Imagination', TS, 1928. NYPL.TC.



Co-operation at the Jewish Art Theatre expressed itself for example in agreement that prominent acting roles should be shared and that every prominent actor should be prepared to 'play as a super if such a role is necessary'.<sup>1</sup> The Little Theatre, alone among the Art Theatres, did not idealize a permanent, close-knit organization from the beginning;<sup>1</sup> but I will try to show that, in practice, these Art Theatre characteristics were present there too. The Neighborhood Playhouse was organized so that its members 'by working together ... may experience the joys of fellowship through service to their ideal'.<sup>1</sup> The New Playwrights set the co-operative tone of their theatre by stating that 'the entire management is in the hands of five working playwrights'.<sup>1</sup> The founders of the New Theatre hoped that the permanence and team work of a 'stock company' would result from their plans.<sup>1</sup> Organization at the Provincetown would clearly offer a very wide scope of activities for its members.

The impelling desire of the group was to establish a stage where playwrights ... could see their plays in action and superintend their productions ... Equally, it was to afford an opportunity for actors, producers, scenic and costume-designers to experiment.<sup>1</sup>

The Washington Square Players described themselves as a group of 'individuals who believe in the future of the theatre in America, and includes playwrights, actors and producers, working with a common end in view'.<sup>1</sup> And the Theatre Guild summed up the general feeling impelling the Art Theatre:

If that young theatre which has manifested its energies in so many communities of the United States is to establish its ideal, it must be in the foundation of a permanent theatre ....

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1. See Chapter III.

It is the aim of the New York Theatre Guild to concentrate these younger energies and to achieve a synthesis of those varied and neglected arts which are of the theatre. Here, it is hoped, will be founded a working centre for the artists of the theatre; and, as in the old guilds, craftsmanship will be the only standard and fraternity its spirit.<sup>1</sup>

A permanent organization and co-operative spirit directed towards achieving artistic unity on the stage were not ideals confined to our group of Art Theatres alone. The Art Theatres shared and articulated a widely felt need which had arisen in reaction to the decline of the stock companies by the turn of the century. In 1899, William Archer spoke in New York of the need for the permanent, 'resident company' as 'the backbone of any artistic advance'.<sup>2</sup> Allen Davenport in his essay on 'The Playwright', regretted the disappearance of such organizations because the actor, singer, musician, stage manager, designer and playwright had become isolated elements in the process of production and had lost prestige in their general subservience to the businessman-producer. The producer 'used' the artist to supply a specialized knowledge instead of contributing as a 'co-operative, adjunctive medium'.<sup>3</sup> Only a permanent association of artists could 'work efficiently and harmoniously to uplift the institution their unity forms'.<sup>4</sup> In

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1. See Chapter III.

2. In The New Theatre (New York, 1909), p.17.

3. In Stage Affairs in America Today (Boston, 1907).

4. 'The New Theatre', in Stage Affairs in America Today (Boston, 1907).



1908, in her article 'The New Theatre', Marguerite Merrington attacked ad hoc casting, preferring the permanent company.<sup>1</sup> There were permanent companies in existence: for example, Heinrich Conreid's Irving Place Theatre (1892), the Standard Company of Actors (1895), the Criterion Independent Theatre (1897) and Belasco's company (1902). Augustin Daly's company held together until 1899 and Daniel Frohman founded a successful group at the New Lyceum in 1903. In the Yiddish-speaking community, relatively stable companies operated under the leadership of Jacob Adler, Boris Thomashevsky and David Kessler. But such organizations were exceptional.

During the Art Theatre era, the educationalist and writer George Pierce Baker founded the 47 Workshop (in 1912) as 'a serious co-operative effort for a common end deeply interesting all'.<sup>2</sup> In the same year the Boston Toy Theatre was dedicated to 'the ideal of co-operation among all the workers'.<sup>3</sup> In 1918, Maurice Schwartz founded a Yiddish-speaking company at the Irving Place Theatre where 'the management and the entire theatre works for one artistic goal'.<sup>4</sup> A number of books appeared to explain how permanent organization functioned and to help small theatres get established: for example, Oliver Hinsdell's Making the Little Theatre Pay, Frank Shay's

1. Bookman (August, 1908).
2. 'The 47 Workshop', Leaflet [1912]. H.TC.
3. Lyman Gale, in T.H. Dickinson, The Insurgent Theatre (New York, 1917), pp.133-34.
4. In D. Lifson, 'A History of the Yiddish Art Theatre Movement in New York: 1918-1940', Diss. New York University, 1963, p.426.



The Practical Theatre and Alexander Dean's The Little Theatre, Organization and Management.<sup>1</sup> The Apprentice Theatre of 1932, a splinter group from the Civic Repertory Theatre, declared that they were 'anxious to work together over a period of years to learn our trade and develop in time into a permanent company'.<sup>2</sup> When William Archer returned to the subject of co-operative theatre in 1921, he praised the influence of the Provincetown and Theatre Guild and saw in their organizations 'very prominent symptoms of a movement so widespread and spontaneous that it may fairly be called national'.<sup>3</sup>

The Art Theatres were influential as well as symptomatic of the co-operative ideal. Of the group, the Provincetown was perhaps the most important. The spirit of co-operation ran through the whole organization, not only between the artists but also between artists and administrators. The Players believed that 'a closely knit group of creative and critical minds is capable of calling forth from the individuals who compose it richer work than they can compose in isolation'.<sup>4</sup> Few organizational restraints existed to hinder mutual effort when the

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1. New York, 1925; New York, 1926; and New York, 1926.
  2. 'The Apprentice Theatre', Leaflet, 1932. NYPL.TC.
  3. 'Drama's Development Needs Well-Conducted Repertory Theatre', New York Evening Post, February 26, 1921.
  4. O. Sayler, Boston Evening Transcript, May 28, 1921.

theatre opened in New York in 1916. No incorporation papers were taken out. The general Membership took executive control. There was an elected, five-member committee of Active Members to manage day-to-day affairs with President (George Cram Cook) and Secretary (Margaret Nordfeldt),<sup>1</sup> but the committee primarily acted as a liaison between playwright and general membership. The membership was held in readiness for the playwright who was to produce his own play. When the author appeared, the committee retired or offered whatever assistance the author needed.<sup>2</sup> The committee might appoint a 'production subcommittee' or a 'scenic subcommittee' but even this responsibility was transferred to the Active Membership in December 1916.<sup>3</sup> In practice, little work was done in committee in the early days. Ida Rauh, a prominent actress, could not remember, later on, whether any such committees existed and recalled that the many minuted resolutions for organization tended not to mean very much:

The whole movement was so unorganized, so casual, so spontaneous, so unpredictable, depending solely on the tasks and genuine basic art feelings of the group who happened to come together.<sup>4</sup>

There were certainly no specialist business managers or press representatives.

The Active Membership was of no fixed number. There were

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1. 'The Provincetown Players', Minutes, October 5, 1916. NYPL.TC.
  2. See H. Deutsch and S. Hanau, The Provincetown: A Story of the Theatre (1931; rpt. New York, 1959), pp.38-39.
  3. 'The Provincetown Players', Minutes, December 11, 1916. NYPL.TC.
  4. In W. Vilhauer, 'A History and Evaluation of the Provincetown Players', Diss. University of Iowa 1965, p.84.

twenty-nine in October 1916. New Members could be elected by simple majority, but such status was not a condition of active participation. The elected Members met each week to discuss all the affairs of the theatre, including play selection. They could be voted out of Active Membership if they did not devote enough time to the theatre.<sup>1</sup> The organization was thus fluid, 'constantly changing to fit the temperaments of the workers and the requirements of the growing theatre'.<sup>2</sup> The Members felt themselves to be 'as a new family'.<sup>3</sup> In the spirit of co-operation Active Members shared many different duties as well as having a voice in the executive and administrative area. Susan Glaspell for example was active as administrator, playwright and actress, James Light as administrator, director and actor and Robert Edmund Jones as administrator, designer and director. When Charles Kuhn decided to leave the group in 1922, he wrote,

I hereby resign my duties as janitor, stagehand, scene-painter, custodian of premises and wardrobe, lecturer and adviser on artistic principles, propagandist for 'the little theatre co-operative' and financial banker of the Provincetown Players.<sup>4</sup>

A number of factors in addition to mutual commitment to certain ideals, served as substitutes for formal organization in binding the group together. There were personal ties: Susan Glaspell was Cook's wife, Ellen Cook his mother. Harry Kemp and

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1. 'The Provincetown Players', Minutes, September 5, 1916. NYPL.TC.
  2. H. Deutsch and S. Hanau, The Provincetown: A Story of the Theatre (1931; rpt. New York, 1959), p.34.
  3. S. Glaspell, The Road to the Temple (New York, 1927), p.236.
  4. Letter from Charles Kuhn to Eleanor Fitzgerald, May 23, 1922. H.TC.



Mary Pyne were husband and wife, so were Bion and Margaret Nordfeldt, Henry and Alice Hall, Wilbur and Margaret Steele, Edward and Stella Ballantine, Edwin and Nancy Schoommaker and William and Marguerite Zorach. Edna and Norma Millay were sisters, Edward J. Ballantine was Saxe Commins' brother-in-law. The background and experience of the members was broadly similar: except for the President and Secretary and later a carpenter all were unpaid and made their livings in the city or as artists of one sort or another. The father of the 'family' was George Cram Cook. He gave the group a cohesion without formal organization that it might never have achieved with it. He distrusted organization and formality and anyway was not adept at laying plans or anticipating problems. He was an idealist, given to sketching his ideas on the backs of menu cards or dirty table cloths, but he possessed the personality to inspire others to work with him and the energy to co-ordinate their work, to make something of it. He was a colourful character, or an eccentric, depending on point of view. He offended a number of people who worked with him, usually because he was forever interfering in every small task, wanting to be involved, unable to delegate responsibility happily. But he was always respected for his enthusiasm. Michael Gold, later prominent in the New Playwrights, described showing Cook one of his plays:

I sat down. Minutes passed and he didn't say a word. Then he began talking like a character in a Dostoevsky novel. He talked as though he had known me for years. He glanced through the play and I told him what I was trying to do. I was an assistant truck driver for the Adams

Express Company, but he made me feel like a God! ... It was what he did for everyone, great, small, dumb or literate.<sup>1</sup>

In later days, when Cook was dead and the Provincetown had a much more organizational and, some thought, less creative character, respect for his work increased.<sup>2</sup>

With the passing of time the group began to expand and to assume a more organized character. Commitment to an ideal, personal ties, common background and respect for Cook were not always enough to draw order from the ferment. Behind the high artistic achievements there was a background of increasingly bitter squabbles. Floyd Dell was shocked

by the ruthless egotisms which ran rampant in the Provincetown Players. I saw new talent rebuffed ... its fingers cruelly stepped on by the members of the original group who were anxious to do the acting whether they could or not .... The new talent, more robust than I supposed, clawed its way onto the raft, and stepped on other new fingers, kicked other new faces as fast as they appeared .... And what did astonish and alienate me was the meanness, cruelty and selfishness which this little theatrical enterprise brought out in people, many of them my old friends whom I had known only as generous and kind.<sup>3</sup>

Susan Glaspell remembered 'anger, failures in working together'.<sup>4</sup>  
The effects of this democratic but occasionally troubled atmosphere

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1. H. Deutsch and S. Hanau, The Provincetown: A Study of the Theatre (1931; rpt. New York, 1959), pp.41-42.
  2. Ibid, p.125.
  3. In W. Vilhauer, 'A History and Evaluation of the Provincetown Players', Diss. University of Iowa 1965, p.199.
  4. The Road to the Temple (New York, 1927), p.277.

became more and more marked: a faction unable to interest the majority of the Active Members in poetic plays split away temporarily in the season 1916-17. In 1917-18 some of the original men of ideas such as Max Eastman, Floyd Dell, Bion Nordfeldt, John Reed and William Zorach left. Between 1919 and 1921 Cook was often absent for long periods and the group became more unsettled. Cook refused to exert any final authority over the Members, or was incapable of doing so,<sup>1</sup> and eventually became disillusioned himself. When the theatre found itself in financial difficulty in 1922 and an interim of one year was called, Cook left for Greece. There he wrote back,

Our individual gifts and talents have sought their private perfection. We have not as we hoped created the beloved community of life-givers .... Since we have failed ... to pull together ... and since the result of this is mediocrity, we keep our promise: we give the theatre we love good death: the Provincetown Players end their story here.<sup>2</sup>

But Cook no longer had the influence to carry his views. In his absence a new organization had come into existence. To protect the name of the theatre during the 1922-23 interim and, later, to raise money, the group incorporated. Nine names appeared on the now formal executive board and not all those names favoured the kind of small scale, democratic enterprise Cook had founded.<sup>3</sup> There was a bitter conflict between a minority faction of

1. See letter from Edna Kenton to George Cram Cook, May 8, 1921. H.TC.
2. In S. Glaspell, The Road to the Temple (New York, 1927), pp.309-10.
3. See letter from Edna Kenton to George Cram Cook, May 5, 1922. H.TC.



Kenneth Macgowan, James Light and Jasper Deeter and a majority faction of Edna Kenton, Eugene O'Neill, Cleon Throckmorton, Harry Weinberger and the Cooks (by proxy). On the one hand there were 'the bloodless revolutionists', on the other 'the old guard'. So long as it seemed that Cook would return, the old guard succeeded in preserving the status quo. But by 1924 Edna Kenton found herself without allies and under intense pressure to resign.<sup>1</sup> Kenneth Macgowan emerged to replace Cook at the head of a much more structured and efficient organization. His lack of charisma in comparison with Cook and his relative inexperience in theatre management (Edna Kenton once said that he was 'untutored in the technic of little theatres [sic]')<sup>2</sup> may also have tended to increase his reliance upon organization. When Susan Glaspell returned to the United States from Greece (where Cook had died) in 1924, she found the organization of the group so different that she called on its members to disassociate themselves even from the name of the Provincetown. She wrote to the theatre, in sorrow and anger:

There never was a more simple organization that the Provincetown Players. It seems to me there never was a more cumbersome one that [sic] you who call yourselves Provincetown Playhouse. We never went in for patrons and this and that kind of stock. We wrote plays and put them on. We did that for a while because we felt like doing it, and we stopped because we were not sure we felt like

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1. See letter from Edna Kenton to Susan (Glaspell) Cook, May 28, 1924. H.TC.
  2. Letter from Edna Kenton to Susan (Glaspell) Cook, September 8, 1923.

going on doing it. That's that. And I wish it should stay at that .... You are profiting by what he /George Cram Cook/ did and you have forgotten him. It is not a spirit that will ever make the kind of place he made.<sup>1</sup>

For two years, between 1923 and 1925, Macgowan headed a ten-member board at the Provincetown. The 'membership' corporation of 1922 became a stock corporation, the members of the board held common stock and were responsible for overall management with two additional representatives of the preferred stock holders and the actors. In practice Macgowan exercised overriding authority. He had secured the agreement of other members of the board that he would have 'full and final power both in production and business management'.<sup>2</sup> Most prominent among his assistants were Eugene O'Neill and Robert Edmund Jones, hence the press sometimes called the organization 'the triumvirate'.<sup>3</sup> In 1924, the triumvirate opened another theatre to the group, the Greenwich Village Theatre. This they incorporated along the same lines as the Provincetown. Macgowan presided over a similar, ten-member board of whom seven were also members of the Provincetown board.<sup>4</sup>

But as the organization expanded, professionalized and became more hierarchical, it retained much of its co-operative spirit.

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1. Letter from Susan Glaspell to Eleanor Fitzgerald, May 25, 1924. H.TC.
  2. TS., November 8, 1923, NYPL.TC.
  3. F. Vreeland, '"Brayvo!" They Cry as Robeson Rages in "Emperor Jones"' /1924/. Clipping, NYPL.TC.
  4. Letter from Edna Kenton to Susan (Glaspell) Cook, May 22, 1924. H.TC.



The group preserved its unity while operating both houses. Both the Provincetown and the Greenwich Village Theatre had their own production staffs chosen by their respective boards but actors were interchangeable. There was a twelve-strong permanent company of actors.<sup>1</sup> Jones and James Light divided most of the directing between them. Jones and Throckmorton handled most of the design work. What the group lost in group inventiveness it gained in teamwork and permanency of relationships. It was still small enough, too, to maintain its family atmosphere and keep almost all executive board members active in the creative side of the theatre.

After one season Macgowan decided that co-ordinating two theatres was not economical. This feeling, combined with a growing sense among many members that the Provincetown of old had not been improved by expansion and increased efficiency, led to the restoration of the Provincetown to independent status. Macgowan gave place on the Provincetown board to James Light and then took the Greenwich Village Theatre its own way. The group split, many Active Members of the early days staying with the Provincetown. But the Provincetown of 1925-29 was not the same organization of 1916-22. Light subordinated his authority to the collective decisions of the board but the board, not the active membership, exercised control. The Provincetown acknowledged the influence of another Art Theatre in this arrangement: it

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1. They were Walter Abel, Edward J. Ballantine, May Blair, Charles Ellis, Helen Freeman, Stanley Howlett, Perry Ivins, Harold McGee, Mary Morris, Allen Nagle, Edgar Stehli and Henry O'Neil.



was hoped 'to operate the theatre in much the same way that the board of managers operated the Theatre Guild'.<sup>1</sup> Light continued to use officers for special duties, a policy the triumvirate had introduced. General management was the responsibility of Eleanor Fitzgerald, technical direction of Cleon Throckmorton, business management of Pauline Turkel and press representation of Stella Hanau, but most of these officers were not artists in the theatre at the same time.<sup>2</sup> In 1929 another, bigger expansion resulted in the entire theatre shifting to the uptown Garrick. Here there were more professional officers and more non-active members on a reorganized board.<sup>3</sup> Whereas in the Village the theatre tended to draw regularly on the same local personnel and on the school organized in 1926 by Leo Bulgakov in association with the theatre, the Provincetown Playhouse at the Garrick drew from the wider uptown pool of professionals and began to move away from its ideal co-operative character. Any further loss of idealism was stayed in December 1929. Financial difficulties brought the theatre to a close.<sup>4</sup>

Almost all the Art Theatres experienced organizational changes

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1. O. Sayler, New York Herald Tribune, May 19, 1929.
  2. 'The Provincetown Players', Leaflet, 1925. Author's collection.
  3. See O. Sayler, 'Provincetown Comes and Goes' New York Herald Tribune, May 19, 1929.
  4. See 'Provincetown Theatre Closed by Lack of Cash', New York Herald Tribune, December 11, 1929.

as they expanded. Expansion itself, in the theatre as in business, has an inherent motivation hard to resist. No theatre shows this tendency in practice more pointedly than the Provincetown. When the group began to read and perform plays as amateurs in 1915 they had no ambition to perform in an uptown theatre. They only wished to perform experimentally and well for their own satisfaction, without any of the strictures of the professional theatre. But their own satisfaction became more difficult to achieve if they could not improve their standards. In 1918 they moved to a larger theatre and in 1920 they invested in substantial stage improvements. After the tremendous artistic and financial success of O'Neill's The Emperor Jones in 1920, they began to look for more plays that could be sent uptown and began to put their energies into full-length instead of one-act plays. They began to attract better actors by offering salaries. But improvements increased costs. Whenever, as frequently happened, an organization met financial difficulties and faced a choice of cutting costs or expanding in the search for more income, the organization expanded. Expansion required more investment which in turn provoked further expansion, the whole process stimulated by a desire for higher standards of achievement. Escalating costs could go out of control and then the organizations faced crisis. If the organization was still relatively small, the crisis might be resolved by calling for a respite, or interim, to break the cycle and enable its members to think out corrective policies. This happened at the Provincetown in 1922, at the Neighborhood Playhouse



the same year, at the American Laboratory Theatre in 1928 and at the Civic Repertory Theatre in 1931. Edna Kenton saw the problem at the Provincetown: 'We expanded, and we've headed ever since for the rocks. Our interim is a direct result of that most human and unwise decision'.<sup>1</sup> Within a season of the Provincetown reopening in 1923, they added another theatre and established a permanent professional company. In 1929 they moved uptown to the Garrick. When the organization was relatively large, financial difficulties were proportionately more dangerous. The crisis of 1929 proved insuperable and the organization collapsed.

While it would be true to say that, at the Provincetown anyway, the element of co-operation diminished in proportion as the organization expanded, as artistic and administrative roles began to separate and as the organization became more structured, co-operation remained a predominant feature. I have selected two specific examples to illustrate this point. Firstly there was a stable group of activists, present through many years of the Provincetown's development, giving the organization continuity, stability and a basis for co-operative work. Its members included George Cram Cook (1916-22), Susan Glaspell (1916-22), Eugene O'Neill (1916-19), Ida Rauh (1916-21), James Light (1916-29), Jasper Deeter (1919-26), Charles Ellis (1918-24), Eleanor Fitzgerald (1918-29), Edna Kenton (1916-29), Harold McGee (1921-29),

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1. Letter from Edna Kenton to George Cram Cook, July 14, 1922. H.TC.



Cleon Throckmorton (1920-29), Harry Weinberger (1922-29), Edward J. Ballantine (1916-28), Robert Edmund Jones (1916-25), Norma Millay (1918-24), Mary Blair (1920-29) and Blanche Hays (1918-21). Secondly, contemporary press reports indicate that the co-operation of the organization broke through on the stage in for example the ensemble work of the actors. In O'Neill's The Moon of the Caribees in 1918, the Players drew comment on the way in which they abandoned the conventional need for the star. One critic complained that the main character was weakly treated in the text 'and nothing in the stage management serves to make up for this deficiency. In no way is he thrust upon our attention to the exclusion of any of his fellows'.<sup>1</sup> In 1925, of Congreve's Love for Love, Heywood Broun wrote, 'The performance is well finished and balanced down through the smallest roles'.<sup>2</sup> And in 1927, when a leading actor in Paul Green's In Abraham's Bosom failed to arrive at the theatre in time for his performance, the cast was flexible enough to change around parts and give a creditable performance.<sup>3</sup>

In the previous chapter I have shown how the organizational beginnings of the Washington Square Players and Provincetown were

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1. 'The New Plays', Boston Evening Transcript, December 23, 1918.
  2. New York World, April 1, 1925.
  3. See J. Brooks Atkinson, in H. Deutsch and Stella Hanau, The Provincetown: A Story of the Theatre (1931; rpt. New York, 1959), pp.149-51.

closely related. In November 1914, Lawrence Langner headed an Organizing Committee to consider the general problems of ideals, finance, accommodation and personnel.<sup>1</sup> Incorporation papers were taken out at an early date. Just as at the Provincetown, a general, democratic group control characterized the earliest period of development. Langner remembered that,

Everyone in the group, including the actors and the clerical force right down to the office boy, had a vote in the selection and casting of plays, with results that were frequently fantastic.<sup>2</sup>

After a few weeks, in the interests of order and efficiency, 'democracy got the worst of it and a committee was set up which limited the decisions to a group of five persons'.<sup>3</sup> The five persons of the executive were the Producing Staff (Holland Hudson, Philip Moeller, William Pennington and Ralph Roeder) and the General Director (Edward Goodman). Langner gave way to Goodman between December 1914 and February 1915, probably because of the demands of his other business interests. The executive appointed officers to take care of special administrative jobs. There was a Playreading Committee (Ida Rauh, Philip Moeller, William Pennington and Dudley Tucker), a House Manager (Dudley Tucker), a Business Manager (Lawrence Langner) and a Publicity Committee (Lucy Huffaker, Griffin Barry and Harold Stearns). All the

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1. See TS, November 11, 1914, NYPL.TC. And see also letters from Melville Rosenow to 'the theatrical enterprise', November 30, 1914; and George Henry Filton to Edward Goodman, January 11, 1915. NYPL.TC.
  2. The Magic Curtain (New York, 1952), p.93.
  3. Ibid.



officers were actively artists as well as filling administrative positions. The Producing Staff selected plays, directors and designers. The director cast the play.<sup>1</sup>

Every member of the group engaged in a number of different tasks, believing that 'success depends upon the loyal co-operation of all for their mutual benefit'.<sup>2</sup> As at the Provincetown, officers discussed all affairs in practice with the active members and allowed criticism: 'At all our meetings we criticize each other frankly. Our actors criticize our directors and each other'.<sup>3</sup> The Players too described themselves as 'a happy family'.<sup>4</sup> Still, it was perhaps natural that there should be conflict at times in such a democratic atmosphere. In 1915 Ida Rauh objected to the casting policy and left to join the Provincetown. In 1917, when the Players received small wages, they quarrelled about their relative pay: a letter to Edward Goodman read,

Being now in the employ of The Players for the past two years, and having always worked earnestly in their interest, that is book-keeping, typing, switchboard operating, besides numerous odd jobs which turn up each day, I feel I am worthy of an advance, and it certainly discourages me when I see that newcomers are started with higher pay and do less for it.<sup>5</sup>

And the designer Lee Simonson walked out and wrote,

My dear Eddy .... My attitude is the direct result of

1. See E. Goodman, in C. Baker, 'Wonder ...', New York Review (June 10, 1916).
2. 'Special Instructions', TS, October 15, 1915. NYPL.TC.
3. Edward Goodman, in C. Baker, 'Wonder ...', New York Review (June 10, 1916).
4. Ibid.
5. Letter to Edward Goodman, October 8, 1917. NYPL.TC.



yours. You have alienated me, as you have done a great many others by the sort of 'diplomacy' that makes esprit de corps impossible.<sup>1</sup>

But common ideals, personal ties, early amateur status, common backgrounds and the leadership of Edward Goodman linked the group together effectively. Goodman may have offended some people but his real contribution was to unite the group in the way that Cook united the Provincetown. A correspondent in 1917 expressed herself glad that he had 'escaped the draft': 'the Washington Square Players couldn't exist without you'.<sup>2</sup> A school and extensive workshop facilities were of material help to a co-operative enterprise with their own contribution to stability and self-sufficiency.

The organization too, like the Provincetown, was caught up in expansion and the pursuit of ever higher standards. Professionalization of personnel began as early as the second Bandbox bill so that, by 1917-18, most activists received some payment for their work. In 1916 the Players transferred to a larger theatre in the commercial theatre district, the Comedy, and rented office space in a building close at hand. But expansion intensified financial problems. Lawrence Langner recalled that it

ultimately resulted in our financial downfall for we all began to engage assistants and sub-assistants to fill these rooms, which gave us the appearance of great prosperity

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1. Letter from 'L.S.' to Edward Goodman, December 29, [1917]. NYPL.TC.
  2. Letter from [Gladys] to Edward Goodman, August 7, 1917. NYPL.TC.

while contributing to our impoverishment.<sup>1</sup>

The war depleted the numbers of the group and when Goodman himself enlisted in 1918 the organization disbanded.

The co-operative character of the group persisted throughout professionalization and expansion. A number of members were active during almost every season: among them Edward Goodman, Philip Moeller, Lawrence Langner, Lucy Huffaker, Robert Lawson, Holland Hudson, William Pennington, Spalding Hall, Josephine Meyer, Robert Fox, Edward Flammer, Ralph Roeder and John King. And the public noted the results of their attempts to reach a synthesis of theatre arts on stage. Of their work in Chekhov's The Seagull, one critic wrote,

Finished in their technique, their absorption of the atmosphere of the work, startling in its profundity,... the members of the cast gave a performance that came close to being flawless.<sup>2</sup>

Another agreed,

The performance may be said to be typical of the Washington Square Players .... Their work is strongly suggestive of the playing of the better class of foreign companies. It is less individualistic and more co-ordinate than that of our average companies.<sup>3</sup>

As in the later periods of both the Players and the Provincetown,

1. The Magic Curtain (New York, 1952), p.100.
2. '"Sea Gull" Scores at Dainty Bandbox', Brooklyn Eagle, May 23, 1916.
3. 'The First Nighter', May 23, 1916. Clipping, H.TC.



the Theatre Guild used the principles of co-operation within a fairly clear structure of relationships. Having incorporated, ultimate authority rested with the board which, after a brief, unsettled period, emerged six strong: Lawrence Langner, Theresa Helburn, Philip Moeller, Lee Simonson, Helen Westley and Maurice Wertheim. But here, self-consciously, the Guild invested no single person with overriding authority. Most of the board members had been with the Washington Square Players and were familiar with the principles of co-operation and with each other; and all of them chose to work as a group and to act on majority decisions. All save the banker Maurice Wertheim were artists as well as administrators.<sup>1</sup> They chose the plays, the director, the production staff and any other administrative officers. The director went on to choose his casts and to exercise a considerable degree of autonomy in conducting rehearsals without interference from the board. But before the play reached the public, the board used collective decision-making to particular effect in viewing the half-rehearsed play. Feeling that they represented a cross-section of the public, they discussed and criticized the work with the director and cast in at least one open meeting.<sup>2</sup>

At another level, the actors participated in a co-operative scheme unique in the professional theatre. The director contracted

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1. They did not write plays for the Guild however, as the Players had done. They felt that to do so would be to engender self-interest and to spoil the co-operative atmosphere.
  2. 'Real Co-operative Theatre' [1919]. Clipping, NYPL.TC.



actors on commercial lines for the run of a play, at a relatively low basic salary. But they received a share of any profits the play might make.<sup>1</sup> Even before they became a permanent company, actors were expected to involve themselves in the running of the theatre - in the design and manufacture of their own costumes for example. By 1920 the Guild directors were turning to a number of sympathetic actors with regularity and in 1926 they organized a permanent company. Workshops and a school for actors upon which the organization could draw (between 1925 and 1928) provided extra stability and increased the group's sense of independence. Here too there was commitment to ideals, personal ties, common experience and permanence and stability of organization which made co-operation possible. The membership in general reflected the behaviour of the board where, said Theresa Helburn, 'no one ever failed to accept the personal defeat without rancour. It has always been the Guild first, never the person'.<sup>2</sup>

The spirit of co-operation had its difficult days. Disagreements led to a number of resignations. Rollo Peters and Augustin Duncan left in 1919, protesting that the Guild had toned down some of the social criticism of John Masefield's The Faithful.<sup>3</sup>

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1. 'Their Idea of a Wonderful Time' [1919]. Clipping, NYPL.TC.
  2. In W.P. Eaton, The Theatre Guild: The First Ten Years (New York, 1929), p.132.
  3. See N. Nadel, A Pictorial History of the Theatre Guild (New York, 1969), pp.5ff.

When the Guild phased out the co-operative remuneration scheme after 1920 yet still managed to attract actors for relatively low wages, there were those who came to feel that higher rates were appropriate for good work or long service: the black cast of Dorothy and Du Bose Heyward's Porgy publicly complained about their treatment<sup>1</sup> and Jacob Ben-Ami,<sup>2</sup> Dudley Digges, Ernest Cossart, Claude Raines and Edward G. Robinson<sup>3</sup> all resigned at different times because of disputes over pay. In 1927 Clare Eames, recently added to the board, resigned because she said she found the place 'uncongenial'.<sup>4</sup> The members of the board quarrelled fiercely and frequently. As Langner recalled,

each point of view, was fought over ad nauseam ... leaving most of us exhausted and disappointed for if we had won one important battle, we were sure to have lost another. And there were really battles.<sup>5</sup>

And over at the Provincetown we find Edna Kenton reporting to the Cooks in 1922 that the Guild was having 'one of its most restrained, secret, subterranean, god-violent rows - over what play shall go first'.<sup>6</sup>

But if the co-operative process was 'democratic but bloody' in all these organizations, its positive, creative factors were

1. 'Debunking the Theatre Guild', New York Review (April 14, 1928).
2. A. Woolcott, New York Times, September 17, 1922.
3. See L. Langner, The Magic Curtain (New York, 1952), pp.244-46.
4. Boston Transcript, March 17, 1927.
5. The Magic Curtain (New York, 1952), p.160.
6. Letter from Edna Kenton to George Cram Cook, September 8, 1922. H.TC.

those for which it existed. In general the members stayed together and the Guild was no exception. In 1930 the composition of the board was almost unchanged. Of the members of the acting company of 1930, Elizabeth Risdon was active as early as 1920, Ernest Cossart 1921, George Gaul 1922, Philip Leigh 1922, Morris Carnovsky 1923, Alfred Lunt 1924, Lynne Fontanne 1924, Glenn Anders 1924, Tom Powers 1925, Earle Larimore 1926, Elliot Cabot 1926, Gale Sondergaard 1928, Frank Conroy 1928, Alexander Kirkland 1928 and Douglas Montgomery 1928. And they accepted the principles of co-operation:

There are no stars in the Guild company. An actor may take a leading part in one play and assume a small part in the next.<sup>1</sup>

Of Shaw's Back to Methuselah, one reviewer commented, 'the acting on the whole was uncommonly good and the co-operative work excellent'.<sup>2</sup>

The co-operative system lasted throughout most of the period 1919-1930, and only began to weaken during the massive expansion of activities after 1928. Then the Guild began to undertake to produce plays for six and more cities outside New York and to need upwards of six separate casts, at a time when audiences were severely affected by the national economic crisis. Financial difficulties led the Guild to weaken its principles: to abandon

1. 'How the Theatre Guild is Organized', Souvenir Programme, 1928. NYPL.TC.
2. 'Unto This Last', Clipping, NYPL.TC.



the permanent company, to develop a star-based artistic policy and ultimately to drop the collective board.

While the Provincetown, the Players and the Guild drew a measure of group identity from the common Village background of many of their members, the Neighborhood Playhouse found a similar stability in a membership drawn from the East Side community. The association of a number of activists - among them Alice and Irene Lewisohn, Sarah Cowell Le Moyne, Blanche Talmud, Agnes Morgan, Ethel Frankau and Mary Brown - went back to the days of the Neighborhood Players. When the Neighborhood Playhouse opened in 1915 they formed a permanent organization, again based on a committee executive. Its members were Alice and Irene Lewisohn, Agnes Morgan, Helen Arthur and Sarah Cowell Le Moyne. This committee of Producing Staff (later renamed Executive Staff) ran day-to-day affairs, selected plays, appointed directors, supervised casting and chose officers to assist in administration. At the head of the Producing Staff were clearly the owners and patrons of the theatre, Alice and Irene Lewisohn, with whom ultimate authority naturally rested; but in practice the Lewisohns allowed the Staff to run the theatre collectively and not always to impress their own authority. All officers and members of the Producing Staff were practising artists.

At first the officers organized a very large number of actors and backstage workers. Some were 'regulars' and therefore formed part of the all-important, permanent core of the organization on

which successful, co-operative work largely depended, but in the earliest days most were not. Even at this time, however, the idea of achieving an artistic synthesis from a large participating membership was well-developed. The Staff were proud that their first production had used 'all manner of workmanship' and had expressed a tremendous 'co-operative interest'.<sup>1</sup> They developed this spirit in succeeding years, between 1920 and 1923, by transforming the relatively unstable, part-time, amateur acting group into a permanent, full-time, professional company.<sup>2</sup> They extended the school and workshop, which had backed the Playhouse from the beginning. In 1916 the organization took in additional premises at 8, Pitt Street, next door to the theatre, to enable these classes and work rooms to develop. They were closely linked with the active group, so those who attended could have

the all important sense of being a part of the production. At the Neighborhood Playhouse they can watch the rehearsals, consult with the actors and derive a point of view which, being helped by the designer, the director and the actors becomes the point of view of the theatre itself and adds just that much towards attaining that unified spirit which should characterize every production in a good repertory theatre.<sup>3</sup>

In this respect the Playhouse claimed (a little unfairly in view

1. 'Jephtha's Daughter Found', TS 1915. NYPL.TC.
2. See 'The Neighborhood Playhouse', Minutes, November 28, 1919; and May 27, 1922. NYPL.TC. The company included Albert Carroll, Otto Hulicius, Marc Loebell, Lily Lubell, Ian Maclaren, Harold Minjer, John Roche, Dorothy Sands, Blance Talmud and Paula Trueman.
3. The Repertory Idea (New York, 1927).



of the work already done by other Art Theatres) to be 'the first theatre in New York to design and make all its own scenery, costumes and properties'.<sup>1</sup>

The same unifying elements were effective at the Playhouse as at the Provincetown, Players and Guild. The Lewisohts particularly drew the group together with their prestige outside the Playhouse, their enthusiasm and their willingness at the same time to be unassuming members of the group. Something of their role is evident in an open letter by them to the cast of two pieces in 1924:

We want to post a few words of deep appreciation for the weeks of effort and caring that have brought the Fantasia and Chout to life .... Our gratitude and deep appreciation to you all.<sup>2</sup>

Retrospectively Alice observed, 'the link which bound us was the link of creative play, our common language'.<sup>3</sup> Another member of the group felt the same force:

Common sacrifice made a peculiar bond in uniting us ... in fact the rehearsals in many instances took the place of the evening meal as the carfare prohibited even a sandwich - the work itself acquired the mana [sic] of religious devotion.<sup>4</sup>

And the public noticed it. When the Playhouse closed in 1927, someone who witnessed the last performance said,

It ended its career with more than a few heart pangs on the

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1. Programme for The Little Clay Cart, December 5, 1924. NYPL.TC. See also 'Report of the Neighborhood Playhouse for the Directors of the Henry Street Settlement', TS [1916]. NYPL.TC.
  2. 'On the Opening of "Fantasia" and "Chout"', TS, 1924. NYPL.TC.
  3. The Neighborhood Playhouse: Leaves from a Theatre Scrapbook (New York, 1959), p.64.
  4. TS [1926]. NYPL.TC.



part of the players and with everyone connected with the organization from porters and doorman to the Misses Lewisohn .... At the end ... Albert Carroll ... called for the teaching staff; members of the workshop, who design the costumes and scenery; the stage hands, the cleaners, the ushers and the doormen, introducing them by groups .... Various members of the company were detected wiping their eyes and several embraced on stage.<sup>1</sup>

By 1927 the group had been together for a long time. On the Executive Staff there were still Alice and Irene Lewisohn, Agnes Morgan and Helen Arthur; and in the technical departments Laura Elliot and Blanche Talmud had been active, since 1915. In the acting company Lily Lubell had acted as early as 1915, Blanche Talmud 1915, Albert Carroll 1915, John Roche 1916, Paula Trueman 1917, Otto Hulicius 1924, Marc Loebell 1924, and Dorothy Sands 1924.

Harmonious life behind the scenes made its mark on stage as almost all observers remarked:

The organization of the performance, the blending of the acting with dancing, the costumery and setting, and the perfection of details, bespeak twelve weeks of constant rehearsal. Acting and producing begin to reach a high plane in Grand Street. One feels that the essential elements of the theatrical art have been moulded into symmetrical form at this remote playhouse. In this respect they surpass all other local enterprises.<sup>2</sup>

The experience of the Neighborhood Playhouse did not prove exceptional in the problems its elements of democracy posed, which sometimes led to internal disputes,<sup>3</sup> and in its expansions,

1. 'Performers Shed Tears', 1927. Clipping, NYPL.TC.
2. 'Full Rounded Theatre', March 19, 1926. Clipping, NYPL.TC.
3. See letter from Alice and Irene Lewisohn to David Vardi, December 1, 1925. NYPL.TC.; and letter from W.R. Michels to Laura Elliott, March 15, 1922. NYPL.TC.

which tended to weaken economic stability and was certainly one of the factors involved in the decision to close the theatre.<sup>1</sup> The same was true of the American Laboratory Theatre.

In terms of democratic co-operation, the end of the first season of operations saw the teaching staff of the Laboratory select a small permanent company from their most promising students. The selection caused bitterness among a number of students who found themselves passed over. Some of them went in a body to join the Provincetown.<sup>2</sup> In 1924 the management sacked a faction which criticized the autonomy of the director of plays and in 1928 reprimanded another faction for criticizing artistic policy. In 1930 they accepted the resignation of the recently appointed general director of the theatre, Maria Germanova, when her views proved to be incompatible with those of the group. The Laboratory expanded between 1923 and 1930 from its quite small beginnings. The founders set up a business trust in 1923: there were five members, or Trustees: Herbert Stockton, Helen Arthur, Isobel Levy, Richard Boleslavsky and Paul Kennady. Executive authority rested with this committee in which control was fairly evenly distributed: Stockton, Levy and Boleslavsky each owned five shares, Arthur and

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1. See J.B. Atkinson, 'The End of an Era', New York Times, May 29, 1927.
  2. See R. Willis 'The American Laboratory Theatre: 1923-1930', Diss. University of Iowa 1968, p.65.

Kennady one.<sup>1</sup> The Trustees appointed a Secretary, Michael Barroy, and a Director, Boleslavsky. The Director appointed a teaching staff in the areas of Acting Technique (Maria Ouspenskaya), Ballet (La Sylphe), Diction (Margaret McLean) and Eurythmics (Elsa Findlay).<sup>2</sup>

Sixteen students formed a permanent company for the second season (1924-25) as the American Laboratory Theatre Repertory Company. The Company remained closely related to the school from which it had sprung but grew more distinct, self-sufficient and professionalized as time went by. By 1928 the Company had become known as the American Laboratory Theatre, the school as the Dramatic School Department of the Laboratory Theatre. By 1930 the school was distinctively known as the Institute of Theatre Arts. Once the school had supplied the personnel for a permanent acting company there ceased to be the same opportunity for students to progress within the organization. To meet this need an Auxiliary Group was formed in 1926 to give students some performance experience before they graduated, in rare cases, to the Laboratory Theatre or, more usually, to other professional stages. The Laboratory expanded into larger and better equipped premises until it became possible to organize workshop facilities. But income always fell short of the amount needed to finance this expansion. Increasing economic vulnerability forced the group to abandon the production season 1928-29 and ultimately to close down altogether in 1930.

If democracy and an urge to develop towards higher production

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1. The business trust was transferred to a corporation in March, 1925.
  2. Most of whom also taught students other than those from the Laboratory.



standards had their negative sides, the esprit de corps they helped create, or of which they were symptomatic, was a source of great creative energy. Within the structure of Trustees, Director, faculty staff, company and students, there was a tremendous respect for creativity at all levels in achieving artistic synthesis on stage. Richard Boleslavsky himself, who believed that the director, or régisseur, had the most considerable task of giving a production its essential unity and rounding off its multitude of facets, also declared (rather colourfully) his faith in teamwork:

Nowhere in the world, except maybe Germany, is teamwork more appreciated than in America. The Ford Enterprises, the United Steel Corp., co-operative stores and department stores are the things which are close and dear to the American heart .... The theatrical Ford has to come.<sup>1</sup>

And another member of the group wrote:

Here in the American Laboratory Theatre we are experimenting in collective creation .... Here ... everyone connected with the theatre - playwrights, directors, actors, designers, even the carpenter and stage hands - can join together to search along the paths of dramatic art.<sup>2</sup>

Like the later Provincetown, they were probably influenced by the Theatre Guild. We find the Laboratory in 1927 comparing itself to 'the Guild of Medieval times'.<sup>3</sup>

There was a marked continuity of personnel at every level:

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1. 'The Future of the Theatrical Art in America', Yiddish Art Theatre Souvenir Book, November 1926. H.TC.  
It could of course be argued that the theatrical Ford (Charles Frohman) had gone down in the Lusitania about ten years previously, but we take Boleslavsky's point.
  2. R. Fricken, 'An Experiment in Play Production', Theatre Magazine (October, 1927).
  3. 'The American Laboratory Theatre', Catalogue, 1927. NYPL.TC.

long serving members include Maria Ouspenskaya (1923-30), Margaret McLean (1923-30), Elsa Findlay (1923-30), Miriam Stockton (1923-30), Boleslavsky (1923-29), La Sylphe (1923-29), Florence House (1923-28), George Auerbach (1923-29), Grover Burgess (1923-28), Harold Hecht (1923-28), Sarah Armes (1923-27) and Richard Aldrich (1926-28). In these conditions the group could work together closely on stage, and Gilbert Gabriel noted of their work (in his review of Miriam Stockton's dramatization of The Scarlet Letter) that 'such evidences of an intelligent ensemble training speak strikingly of what the Laboratory Theatre wants most to do, and what it can do in part already'.<sup>1</sup>

Over commonly held ideals and common backgrounds,<sup>2</sup> Richard Boleslavsky exerted perhaps the strongest unifying influence. His was not leadership by popularity or powerful personality. In fact he seems largely to have done without either. Like all great teachers he was rather in possession of a new way of looking at his subject. He held the key to the Stanislavsky system when New York was still full of admiration for the visiting Russian companies having just seen them for the first time. He had a knowledge which of itself commanded respect. Unfortunately for the Laboratory he was personally ambitious and his desire to build a great career in his adopted country often led him into other projects. The Laboratory could do without him for short periods,

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1. 'The Play of the Scarlet Letter', New York Sun, January 8, 1926.
  2. Though not drawn from a particular area of New York, as were the members of the Provincetown, Players, Guild and Playhouse, most of the students, and later the company, tended to be youthful and from well-to-do families.



but his occasional lack of interest caused concern and shows how important he was to the group. Once when he was away, Miriam Stockton drafted a letter to him:

It is impossible and ridiculous to attempt to build up a whole young theatre without a director. This theatre has been created for you - do you want it, do you want to do by it as should be done - or do you not? We need to know.<sup>1</sup>

When he eventually resigned in 1928, the group did hold together for two seasons but obviously suffered in his absence. By contrast, Eva Le Gallienne at the Civic Repertory Theatre bullied and befriended the group there and put all her energy and enthusiasm into the work.

Like Winthrop Ames at the Little Theatre, Eva Le Gallienne actually lived for a while in the theatre which she founded, in a small apartment on the uppermost floor. The critic Brooks Atkinson observed that headstrong and winsome, she 'infused the entire organization with her own personality'.<sup>2</sup> Later Le Gallienne herself acknowledged her central role with something approaching regret:

It is wrong for one person to make speeches, raise money, decide on business and financial details, choose the plays, make up the schedules, design productions and direct and act as well.<sup>3</sup>

She did involve herself with all of these activities but never

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1. In R. Willis, 'The American Laboratory Theatre: 1923-1930', Diss. University of Iowa 1968, p.237.
  2. 'Art in 14th. Street', New York Times, December 15, 1929.
  3. 'Repertory - When?', Theatre Arts Monthly (September, 1958), p.76.



played the autocrat. She would be finally responsible for all major decisions but the group was too much a family to be governed by a single member. Other activists involved themselves in both artistic and administrative duties: Mary Ward, Walter Jones and Joseph Kramm for example. She certainly invited the co-operation of the other members of an executive committee over which she presided: Helen Lohman (Vice President) and Mrs. Stuart Benson (Secretary). And she brought in the members of the Civic Repertory Theatre Club to vote periodically on whether plays in the repertory should be retained or dropped.<sup>1</sup> So the co-operative spirit prevailed. Le Gallienne plainly admitted that the ideals of the Civic were 'realized through the belief and unselfish efforts of many people'.<sup>2</sup>

Many members of the group stayed together throughout the theatre's seven years including Le Gallienne, Helen Lohman, Mrs. Stuart Benson, Ruth Norman, Paul Leyssac, Agnes McCarthy, Sayre Crawley, Harold Moulton, Beatrice de Neergaard, Leona Roberts, Beatrice Terry and Ruth Wilton. It was a closely related group. A number were immigrants, many of them with reputations made in the commercial theatre to whom the Civic was an ideological home as well as a business. Personal ties were particularly strong here: Leona Roberts' daughter Josephine Hutchinson and husband Walter Beck were both active, Le Gallienne's

1. The Civic Repertory Theatre Club opened in 1927 to all members of the public. Payment of an annual subscription entitled a member to attend general meetings.
2. At 33 (New York, 1934), p.247.

cousin Beatrice de Neergaard was of the company and Sayre Crawley was the husband of Mary Ward. Even though the group abandoned the theatre in 14th. Street in 1932 to play uptown and then on tour, most members were still together at the end of 1933. Co-operation behind the scenes produced that synthesis of acting on stage. The spirit of the amateur shone through as the group produced work obviously 'the result of ... infinite pains and constant readjustment of human values among a group of actors constantly playing together'.<sup>1</sup>

One of the best known actors at the Civic Repertory, Jacob Ben-Ami, had had particular experience of co-operative enterprise. Along with Emanuel Reicher he had founded just such a group five years previously at the Jewish Art Theatre. The same pattern of characteristics, which is now becoming clear, was evident there. Ideally there was to be an executive committee of six, representing playwrights, designers and actors<sup>2</sup> but I have been unable to confirm this arrangement in practice.<sup>3</sup> The opening programme suggests a more complex, but nonetheless democratic organization. Ultimate executive authority rested with the corporation directors,

1. R. Skinner, '"The Sea Gull"', Commonweal (October 2, 1929), p.564; cf. E. Le Gallienne, New York Herald Tribune, March 24, 1929.
2. See Chapter III, p.85; cf. 'H.P.S.', 'The Jewish Art Theatre', Nation (September 6, 1919).
3. But cf. D. Lifson, 'A History of the Yiddish Art Theatre Movement in New York: 1918-1940', Diss. New York University 1963, p.514.

Louis Schnitzer (President) and Ben-Ami (Representative of the General Directorate). They appointed the General Directorate, a larger committee of five, chaired by Ben-Ami, which governed the organization in practice. The General Directorate in its turn worked in association with a large twelve-strong Art Advisory Council which was composed of artists from every different branch of production. The usual administrative officers and a permanent acting company completed the structure.

The General Directorate selected the director for each play and then, like the board at the Guild, exercised only a supervisory function. Co-operation was as central to the production as it was to the administration. The actors took equal billing, as they did at most Art Theatres, rotated between large and small parts, accepted competition in the casting process and even double casting for the same role.<sup>1</sup> Like the players at the Neighborhood Playhouse, the American Laboratory Theatre and the Civic Repertory Theatre, they found time to retreat to quieter, rural surroundings on occasion to experiment privately as a group. Kenneth Macgowan, later of the Provincetown, saw them on stage and reported, 'It is an ensemble such as we have rarely seen in America'.<sup>2</sup> At the end of the first season, the critic Rebecca Drucker described the company as

a flexible, economical, highly group-conscious organization

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1. Both the American Laboratory Theatre and Civic Repertory Theatre introduced this practice.
  2. 'The Theatre', New York Globe, September 24, 1919.



in which there were no excrescences and in which every individuality was preserved whole.<sup>1</sup>

The Yiddish-speaking basis of the group was a natural unifying force, to which was added the similar, often immigrant backgrounds of its members. Several actors, Ben-Ami, Celia Adler, Anna Appel and Jechiel Goldsmith for example, had previously been associated at Maurice Schwartz' Irving Place Theatre. And there was 'the thread of the personality and imagination of Jacob Ben-Ami'<sup>2</sup> to bind them together. Ben-Ami was idealistic, ambitious and an actor of outstanding talent, as his later successes were to prove. In practice a good deal of the prominent parts and the directing fell to him. When he left, as Reicher had done before him,<sup>3</sup> to work on the English-speaking stage, the Art Theatre struggled on for another year, lost impetus and disbanded.

The New Playwrights' Theatre, the New Theatre and the Little Theatre did less to advance the ideal of co-operation in practice. Neither the New Playwrights nor the Little Theatre established such permanent acting companies; the New Theatre and the Little Theatre were more dominated by expert administrations than by a collective process of decision-making; and none of these organizations so thoroughly integrated the executive,

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1. 'The Jewish Art Theatre', Theatre Arts Magazine (July, 1920), p.223.
  2. Vanity Fair (September, 1920). Clipping, NYPL.TC.
  3. He joined the Theatre Guild in 1919.

administrative and artistic functions. But they did develop strong co-operative characteristics.

At the New Playwrights Theatre for example, the executive worked as a co-operative group. Em Jo Basshe, John Dos Passos, Francis Edwards Paragoh, Michael Gold and John Howard Lawson formed a committee at the head of the corporation in which power was equally shared. Some personal associations had already been forged before 1927,<sup>1</sup> its members were all primarily interested in writing plays and they were all vigorous socialists. Surprisingly, as students of Communist doctrine, they let organization drift along in a state closely resembling anarchy. They had no regular meetings and appear to have taken no minutes.<sup>2</sup> They tended to do as much work of all kinds as they could themselves,

because of the great need for harmony and the feeling that it would be difficult to find elsewhere the high pitch of enthusiasm needed to put over a project of this nature.<sup>3</sup>

But co-operative work was less evident away from this small central group. There were actors like Lionel Ferrend, Herbert Bergman, Murray Franklin, Jane Barry, Lawrence Bolton and Ross Matthews, to whom the Playwrights turned with frequency, but there was no permanent company. For a time a student group and workshop facilities supported the organization,<sup>4</sup> but after a financial crisis

1. See Chapter IV, p.126.

2. Em Jo Basshe, in G.A. Knox and H.M. Stahl, Dos Passos and the Revolting Playwrights(Uppsala, 1964), pp.75ff.

3. New York Evening Post, October 29, 1927.

4. A. Kandel, New York Times, November 6, 1927.

at the end of the first half-season there was little hope that such co-operative characteristics could continue to develop on this scale. In fact the Playwrights, along with the Little Theatre, did not follow the expansionist path of the other Art Theatres. Here were two organizations which began to operate to professional standards and contracted under economic pressure. The Playwrights moved downtown, first to the Cherry Lane Theatre, then to a small office in West 14th. Street from which they rented the Provincetown stage. When the organization was not producing, there were few more permanent staff than the members of the executive committee themselves. In 1927-28, Gold, Dos Passos, Faragoh and Lawson began to lose interest and undertook other jobs at the same time, leaving Basshe to manage the theatre for the most part. Basshe himself gave up the struggle in 1929.<sup>1</sup>

At the New Theatre, it was mainly the artists who worked in co-operation. There was a permanent acting company, numbering twenty-eight at the beginning of the first season in 1909, which remained relatively stable in composition over the two production seasons.<sup>2</sup> The production staff too had a stable composition.

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1. See New York Times, April 26, 1929.

2. Still playing in 1910-11 were Frank Gilmore, Jacob Wendell Jr., Lee Baker, Ben Johnson, William McVay, Cecil Yapp, Pedro de Cordoba, John Tansey, Thais Lawton, Elsie Kearns, Mrs. Sol Smith, Louis Calvert, Harriet Dellenbaugh, Albert Bruning, Ferdinand Gottshalk, Olive Wyndham and E.M. Holland.



There was a sophisticated workshop to supply all scenery and properties. In practice the stage director and designer worked in close alliance, bringing in the actors' opinions as they worked in rehearsal. An overall synthesis of artistic contributions was at first made difficult because the founders, in trying to establish an acting company of quality, had hired actors ranking as stars in the commercial theatre. E.H. Sothern and Julia Marlow did not easily succumb to the ensemble spirit which only asserted itself effectively after 1909 when they had resigned, after an endless battle with the director George Platt. When Sothern and Marlow insisted on arranging their blocking to focus attention on themselves, Platt reblocked the rest of the cast to neutralize their effect. The theatre's commitment to co-operation was eventually rewarded. At the end of the first season in his review 'The New Theatre on Trial', William Mailly was enthusiastic about the 'rounded achievement' of the resident company.<sup>1</sup> Another critic remarked of The Winter's Tale

the company ... played as if it meant to score at honest team work. To pick flaws in such a performance is to use a microscope on Reubens.<sup>2</sup>

At the heart of the organization was the Director, Winthrop Ames. Fastidious, intellectual and rather aloof, he interested himself in every aspect of the enterprise. A contemporary account of his work, 'Going Through a Day with Winthrop Ames', described him as

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1. Twentieth Century Magazine (June, 1910).
  2. New York Dramatic Mirror, April 19, 1910.

'Stage Manager', 'Business Manager', 'Ames the Organizer', 'Ames the Man who Engages Actors' and 'Ames the Architect'.<sup>1</sup> Like Cook, Goodman, the Lewisoahns, Boleslavsky, Le Gallienne and Ben-Ami, he was an additional link between the artistic departments. He took perhaps too much responsibility into his own hands for co-operative work to develop fully but it is difficult to see how such a large group of more than two hundred members could have functioned without such a central authority. Its very size demanded the more authoritarian hand of the régisseur.

Like the New Playwrights, the New Theatre as a whole did not work as such a close-knit group. Ames provided the only link between the artists and the executive. There was no basic interchanging of roles. The founders, none of whom were artists, controlled the theatre through an eight-member committee. They appointed a Director (Ames), a Business Manager (Lee Shubert) and a Literary Manager (John Corbin). The Director was to be 'the responsible executive agent of the Executive Committee, and to him they shall delegate the entire active and technical management of the theatre'.<sup>2</sup> He appointed all other administrative officers, few of whom in practice were also artists.

When Ames resigned his post at the New Theatre in 1911, the founders had great difficulty in finding someone to replace him.

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1. New York Times, December 12, 1909. Clipping, H.TC.
  2. W. Ames, 'Prospectus', July 13, 1908, p.19. NYPL.TC.

This problem, along with a number of others, drove them to disband the organization.

If Ames was important in the New Theatre organization, his role was still more central at his own Little Theatre. He was founder, financial backer, chief executive, chief administrator, director of most plays and the only member of the organization active throughout the five years of its existence. But within this structure there were co-operative elements which Ames fostered when he could do so without giving up his authority. At first he worked in a permanent committee with George Platt, who worked on productions, and E.E. Lyons, who managed the business side. All three had worked together at the New Theatre. They made decisions as a group.<sup>1</sup> There was no permanent company but here, as at the New Playwrights' Theatre, there were artists to whom the Little Theatre turned with frequency: to Frank Reicher for example, Wilfred North, Walter Howe, Edith Wynne Matthison, Ferdinand Gottschalk, Grace George, Kate de Becker, Robert Rendel, Cecil Yapp, Reginald Barlow, Oswald Yorke and Louise Seymour. And of these North, Matthison, Gottschalk, George, Yapp and Yorke had all worked together at the New Theatre. The critic H.T. Parker saw them play in Galsworthy's The Pigeon and reported that they

might have been long associated and long established in the piece, so complete was the homogeneity of style and the ease of interplay with which they acted.<sup>2</sup>

Financial pressures prevented Ames from developing a co-operative

1. See B. Pemberton, New York Times, November 7, 1937.

2. 'Galsworthy's New Play', Boston Evening Transcript, March 12, 1912.



group to any greater extent. Staffing and casting became increasingly ad hoc and production sporadic. In 1917 the skeleton staff transferred permanently to Ames' Booth Theatre, as they had done on occasion in the past, and the Little Theatre was leased off to the commercial producer, Oliver Morosco.<sup>1</sup>

One may assert, then, that all the Art Theatres, from the Provincetown to the Little Theatre, espoused the ideal of co-operation and exhibited many of its characteristics in practice: permanence and stability of personnel, integration of executive, administrative and artistic functions, a structure permitting general participation in all levels of decision making, a group identity forged by commitment to commonly held ideals, similar backgrounds of members, personal ties and charismatic leadership - the whole expressed in a notably synthesised art form.

The organizations of the Art Theatres were under a variety of pressures for change: internal, arising out of for example new ideas, personal differences between members, the arrival or departure of special talents and, most important, financial problems; and external, such as availability of resources, union regulations and press criticism. Resilience and the ability to absorb change, and therefore to survive, were obviously important elements in the successful organizational structure. For brevity, I have not

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1. See New York Telegraph, February 25, 1917. Clipping, NYPL.TC.

discussed organization changes in detail but closer examination would range the theatres roughly along the lines already laid out here in the treatment of co-operative characteristics.<sup>1</sup> A correlation therefore seems to exist between co-operative organization and the ability to change and absorb change. But there is also a correlation between these characteristics and those which, in the previous chapter, I suggested afforded advantages to certain theatres at their foundation.<sup>2</sup> If this is true, then we can perhaps extend the generalizations deriving from the previous chapter and say that the broadly based financial system, the broadly based co-operative organizations, evolutionary experience before formalization of organization and ability to change and absorb change later, are characteristics often interrelated and held in common by those theatres which achieved the highest degree of security.

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1. i.e. the Provincetown, the Washington Square Players, the Theatre Guild, the Neighborhood Playhouse, the American Laboratory Theatre, the New Playwrights' Theatre, the Jewish Art Theatre, the Civic Repertory Theatre, the Little Theatre and the New Theatre, from most to least flexible.

2. See Chapter IV, p.151.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE FEDERATED AUDIENCE

With co-operation the secret of artistic success on the stage, the most logical accompaniment is co-operation in the audience.

Dudley Digges, 'Co-operative Audiences',  
New York Evening Sun, May 3, 1920.



The ideal of co-operation influenced more than the active memberships of the Art Theatres. The audiences themselves co-operated with the Art Theatre in much more positive, organized ways than they did with the commercial theatres. To describe them as 'federated' to their representative theatres seems most appropriate. The term suggests both an organized and co-operative relationship and audiences retaining a large measure of control over their own organization and behaviour.<sup>1</sup>

Very few studies have examined the composition and behaviour of the overall American audience. Nor have they examined its organization, that is to say how theatres made contact with it, how much it paid and in what way. Theatre office records do help to make quite a clear picture of organization but, for audience composition and behaviour, we must rely largely on the casual observations of reviewers and the memoirs of general theatregoers. Not until the 1940s were audience surveys made and those in a desultory fashion.

There have been some general studies. Ben Graf Henneke's 'The Playgoer in America: 1752-1952' is perhaps the most important.<sup>2</sup> Henneke rightly observes that a change in audience composition, behaviour and organization took place after about 1912.<sup>3</sup> He

1. Cf. D. Digges, 'Co-operative Audiences', New York Evening Sun, May 3, 1920; and see T.H. Dickinson, The Insurgent Theatre (New York, 1917), p.76.
2. Diss. University of Illinois 1956.
3. Ibid, pp.185ff.

suggests that continuing immigration, which had given a predominantly popular character to theatregoing in the nineteenth century, eventually created a reaction in favour of theatrical presentations designed for narrower, more intelligent, more discriminating audiences. Sports stadia, movie houses, Vaudeville and Burlesque houses were providing additional dimensions to popular entertainment and attracting audiences away from the 'legitimate' theatre. The 'legitimate' theatres responded in the main by becoming more competitive and more popular but by 1912 were beginning to find a different, more discriminating audience, either through the plays they presented or in the ways they produced them. As Winthrop Ames observed,

The motion pictures have come along to satisfy the wants of what was once the melodrama audience and now producers can put on plays for intelligent people.<sup>1</sup>

But Henneke does not discuss the details of this change and the part the Art Theatres played in it. There was a vigorous debate, heard at least as early as 1909, about the relationship between the popular audience and the condition of the drama. Those concerned argued how far the audience should be held responsible for bad plays and whether special audiences (having special interests or wealth, as well as intelligence and taste), which seemed likely to appear if the audience itself was to initiate reform or if the drama was to be reformed by some other means, were desirable. The Art Theatres were central to this

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1. February 13, 1929. Clipping, NYPL.TC.

debate and its resolution.

In 1907 the critic Allen Davenport argued that the popular audience could not be held responsible for the condition of the drama. If the drama was poor,

not even under such conditions should we blame the public ....  
Of all factors swaying the theatre, it is the least and  
last to be censured. It is the outward, visible condition  
of the theatre that ever confronts it.<sup>1</sup>

Many critics held, like Davenport, that the producer was accountable. They argued that the audience, or part of it, was ready to appreciate different plays if only it had the chance to see them.<sup>2</sup> The Art Theatres as a group put this theory to the test. In taking the initiative and producing plays of finer quality, they hoped in turn to educate the taste of their audience. In 1908 the New Theatre stated that its mission was to 'foster and stimulate Art'.<sup>3</sup> Elsewhere it was described as 'a training school for the public ... to prove the best plays can pay'.<sup>4</sup> Later, the Little Theatre undertook to 'deepen and widen ... taste',<sup>5</sup> the Neighborhood Playhouse to make 'a definite effort in directing and fostering aesthetic experience',<sup>3</sup> the Washington Square Players to cultivate 'a sympathetic appreciation of the possibilities of our experiment',<sup>3</sup>

1. 'The Dramatic Critic', in Stage Affairs in America Today (Boston, 1907).
2. M. Merrington, 'The New Theatre', Bookman (August, 1908).
3. See above, Chapter III.
4. 'The Players', Everybody's Magazine (February, 1910).
5. Winthrop Ames, in A. Patterson, 'The Little Theatre and Its Big Director', Theatre Magazine. Clipping, H.TC.



the Provincetown 'to develop in ourselves and our audience the capacity to achieve and understand whatever the creative spirit may demand',<sup>1</sup> and the American Laboratory Theatre to make 'the American public theatre-conscious'.<sup>2</sup> The Civic Repertory followed the same line: Eva Le Gallienne claimed that she

could never understand why the public of America should be rated below the public of Germany, for example, in intelligence - and if it were true that they were inferior, I sensed that the fault did not lie with the public but with the powers who provided them with entertainment.<sup>3</sup>

But while the Art Theatres provided improved entertainment, they expected a favourable response from the audience, if not suddenly at least over a period of time, when the ends they were trying to achieve were better understood. The Washington Square Players asserted in 1915 that 'a creative impulse in the theatre must find a counterpart of appreciation in its audience - or it cannot live'.<sup>4</sup> The Provincetown took up the demand in 1920: 'We want our writers and actors to know and feel that there exists for them here an audience equal to their best'.<sup>5</sup> In 1925 the Neighborhood Playhouse printed an observation by Whitman in their programme: 'to have great poets, there must be great audiences too';<sup>6</sup> in 1927, the New Playwrights issued the strongest appeal

1. 'The Provincetown Playhouse', Leaflet, 1925. Author's collection.
2. Programme for The Straw Hat, October 1926. NYPL.TC.
3. TS [1928]. NYPL.TC.
4. Programme for Love of One's Neighbor, April 15, 1915. H.TC.
5. 'The Provincetown Players', Leaflet, 1920. NYPL.TC.
6. Programme for The Dybbuk, December 16, 1925. Author's collection.

of all in the periodical New Masses:

New Masses readers need this theatre. It is the one chance we have all had for many years to create this necessary theatre. We must all throw ourselves into the work of supporting it. It must grow ... Everyone of us must help it. This should be both our duty and our great pride. This chance may not come again soon. We strongly urge our readers to perform their duty at once.<sup>1</sup>

Between 1909 and 1932 the Art Theatres led critical opinion away from the notion that the producer was mainly responsible for the condition of the drama. Critics increasingly held the general audience equally or even mainly accountable. When the New Theatre ran into financial difficulties H.T. Parker wrote,

It has been said to weariness that we must educate our stage to acting. By the fortunes of the New Theatre, there is as much need to educate audiences ... to appreciation of it.<sup>2</sup>

In 1930 a Civic Repertory actress, Mary Ward, wrote,

I do not believe that the theatre will ever take its rightful place in American cultural life until our audiences improve - until they learn to look upon it as something bigger and finer than just a place of amusement.<sup>3</sup>

And other critics like Charlton Andrews and Robert Benchley began to hit out at an audience of 'plain stupidity', behaving as if at a 'children's matinée'.<sup>4</sup>

But at the same time the Art Theatre group was involved in

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1. M. Gold, 'A New Masses Theatre'. Clipping, NYPL.TC.
  2. Boston Transcript. Clipping, H.TC.
  3. 'The Young Idea', Civic Repertory Theatre Bulletin, 1930. Clipping, NYPL.TC.
  4. C. Andrews, 'Elevating the Audience', Theatre Magazine (February, 1917), p.102; and R. Benchley, 'The Theatre', New Yorker (June 27, 1931), p.26.

the resolution of another, related problem arising out of the first. The education of audience taste was necessarily uneven. It drew interest groups, class groups, intelligence groups or otherwise recognizable fractions out of the popular audience and gave them an identity. For the Art Theatres this was both economically advantageous and acceptable in its own terms. To attract a loyal, identifiable audience restored an element of stability which experimental artistic policies weakened. And to establish a standard of higher quality among a concentrated few might be the means of its rapidly spreading contagiously to the wider audience.<sup>1</sup>

At first there was a good deal of opposition. When the New Theatre was introducing its special artistic policy (socially elitist in implication) in 1909, the Evening Sun spoke out for broad popular appeal. The New Theatre, it said,

must show itself to be the true type of the oldest kind of theatre, a house of amusement for the whole public ... not merely for the rich, or for the 'people who want to laugh', or for the 'religious element', or for the foreign born, or the cultivated, or the vulgarians, or the actors, or the literati or the pseudo-literati, or the Ibsenites, or the Shavians, or for any separate set of theatregoers.<sup>2</sup>

Again when Ames declared in 1912 that his Little Theatre was going

1. Special audiences with organized relationships to their theatres were not unknown to the American theatre before 1909. There were occasional theatre clubs or subscription theatres where membership or advance tickets for a full season of plays were sold and relatively stable well-defined audiences therefore established. These included for example The New York Theatre of Arts and Letters (1891), Heinrich Conreid's Irving Place Theatre (1892) and the Standard Company of Actors (1895). The most prominent example of all was certainly the Metropolitan Opera House.
2. November 6, 1909. Cf. W. Mailly, 'The New Theatre on Trial', Twentieth Century Magazine (June, 1910).



to be 'a place of entertainment for intelligent people',<sup>1</sup> and to stage plays 'that would not by their nature attract a miscellaneous public',<sup>2</sup> Clayton Hamilton argued in his review 'The Advent of the Little Theatre' that it was 'dangerous to cater to cliques, to be exclusive, to split up the audience, to emphasise cleavages already tending to be there'.<sup>3</sup> But by 1920, after the Neighborhood Playhouse for example had been formed 'to share in the life of the neighborhood' and the Jewish Art Theatre to be 'the first [i.e. the finest] Jewish theatre in America',<sup>4</sup> the idea of a special audience no longer drew such hostile criticism.<sup>5</sup> In that year the Provincetown characterized its ideal audience as 'perhaps a thousand men and women who, as individuals, are the spiritual equals of those who saw the first performances of Aristophanes, Moliere or Shakespeare'.<sup>6</sup> And in 1921 the critic Tracy Lewis commended the fact that New Yorkers had so many and varied theatrical shows, by which all tastes could be satisfied.<sup>7</sup>

The special audiences which the Art Theatres often created

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1. See above, Chapter III.
2. In 'Mr. Ames' Theatre', Boston Transcript [1912]. Clipping, H.TC.
3. Bookman, (May, 1912).
4. See above, Chapter III.
5. Cf. C. Andrews, 'Elevating the Audience', Theatre Magazine (February, 1917), p.102.
6. 'The Provincetown Players', Leaflet, 1920. NYPL.TC.
7. 'Intellectual Groups Are Now Provided For', February 27, 1921. Clipping, NYPL.TC.

for economic and/or educational reasons were organized to different degrees. Most organized was the Provincetown audience, which I will consider first. I will then try to show how the other Art Theatres tended towards this same ideal.

Before moving to New York the active members of the Provincetown were less concerned with organizing their audience than with enjoying themselves in writing and performing their plays without the usual considerations given to attracting spectators. The spirit in which the first audiences in Provincetown were asked to bring their own seats was strong. But economic pressures soon turned the Players' attentions to the financial benefits to be gained from audience organization. In the second Provincetown season they supplemented their own contributions with a 50 cents admission charge. When funds ran low in the same season, George Cram Cook wrote personally to all regular members of the audience known to the group to ask for advance payments for the remaining three bills. Some eighty-seven respondents paid probably \$1.00, at 50 cents discount and a subscription system was born. (For those who did not subscribe, the 50 cents admission for each bill remained.)<sup>1</sup>

When the group moved to New York, strict building and fire regulations (such as those which had forced the Washington Square Players to abandon 139, Macdougall Street) strengthened its reliance on the subscription system and forced it to drop direct box-office

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1. See above, Chapter IV, pp.148f.

admission. Without box-office sales the group could describe itself as a private club, needing no costly theatre licence and no regulation by laws. The group again compiled a list of potentially regular customers and circularized them in advance of the 1916-17 season. There were at first about sixty-four individual subscribers, as well as the New York Stage Society which purchased a block of subscriptions for its own members. Each Subscriber paid perhaps \$5.00 for one seat at each of ten bills. But the organization was becoming more intricate. The group now introduced a 'Membership' status, for which it charged a small sum: the Member subsequently bought individual tickets for shows as he desired. Both Subscribers and Members could buy guest tickets.<sup>1</sup>

Until 1923 at least, the Provincetown self-consciously refused to flatter or allure its audience. It was never possible to reserve a seat. The benches were notoriously hard to sit upon. The press had no publicity stories, no agents, no free tickets. When the critic Ralph Block arrived late one evening in 1917, he reported to his readers how he had been made to wait in the drafty lobby until a suitable interval in the play occurred.<sup>2</sup> But the active members of the Provincetown were already fundamentally and increasingly aware of the value of establishing and developing closer ties with their audience. They knew in 1916 that 'in order to make possible the experiment, a sufficient audience must in a sense be guaranteed'.<sup>3</sup>

1. 'The Provincetown Players', Minutes, September 5, 1916. NYPL.TC. It appears that 'Membership' status was not offered beyond 1917.
2. 'Drama', November 14, 1917. Clipping, H.TC.
3. 'The Provincetown Players', Leaflet, 1916. NYPL.TC.



And they knew that close ties involved more than businesslike organization of a subscription system. The formal bonds of subscription payments and regular attendances were reinforced by informal contacts and audience participation. In 1917 for example, they invited Subscribers to chose four plays from the 1916-17 season to make up a review bill. They circularized Subscribers with general information about each coming season and at the end of each season with appeals to renew their association. They contacted them before every play with details of times and any changes of plan and they sent them their tickets for their favourite day. The tone of these communications was usually familiar:

On account of the printer's delay in getting the tickets to us, will you kindly call at the box office for your admission tickets .... Hoping that you will enjoy the play as much as we have enjoyed producing it; we are, cordially yours.<sup>1</sup>

And audience reactions to policy were occasionally sought:

You have not yet resubscribed for the new season .... It is important because it means actual money lost. It is far more important because it implies spiritual failure on our part. Have we failed in our work? Have we failed in our choice of a future program?<sup>2</sup>

In or around 1920 the Provincetown reintroduced the direct admission charge with the slight modification that those admitted be registered as members of the club for the duration of the performance.<sup>3</sup> But the group continued to use the subscription

1. Circular, January 28, 1924. H.TC.
2. Circular, September, 1924. NYPL.TC.
3. See B. O'Rourke, 'At the Sign of the Sock and Buskin', New York Morning Telegraph, February 16, 1919. The Provincetown was prosecuted for this practice in 1926 but judgement was in favour of the theatre. See New York Review, May 1 and May 8, 1926.

system with an ever increasing list of contributors until it stopped work in 1929. When the Provincetown combined with the Greenwich Village Theatre in 1924, the two theatres offered a combination subscription for shows at both houses at a discounted price.

Changes were principally confined to rising prices. Economic pressures reduced the number of bills in the subscription season from ten to six by 1920-21, then increased prices to \$7.50 in 1920. There was probably a specific cause of the large 1920 increase. In January the theatre was required to pay some \$5,000 in war taxes. This 10% levy had not been made on subscription charges since the group believed, or hoped, that by claiming that its work was of an educational nature it could find exemption. The group circularized all previous Subscribers in an effort to recoup the sum but probably failed to bring in the full amount.<sup>1</sup> In 1923 subscriptions cost \$8.25; in 1924 \$11.00 at both the Greenwich Village and Provincetown or \$20.00 in combination, before falling slightly to \$10.00 in 1929.<sup>2</sup>

From the evidence available, this organization seems to have at least fostered the growth of a distinctly loyal and stable audience. In 1917 for example, the theatre claimed that most of the subscribers of 1916-17 had resubscribed.<sup>3</sup> And of the 1917-18 season an active

1. See W. Vilhauer, 'A History and Evaluation of the Provincetown Players', Diss. University of Iowa 1965, pp.116-17.
2. See 'Experiment at the Provincetown Playhouse, Repertory at the Greenwich Village', Leaflet, 1924; and 'Selling Points', TS, 1929. NYPL.TC.
3. 'The Provincetown Players', Leaflet, 1917. NYPL.TC.

member Alfred Kreyborg observed disdainfully: 'The Provincetown Players were now so popular that some of their Subscribers might come automatically to anything that held the boards of the converted stable.'<sup>1</sup> To this loyal group the theatre expressed its gratitude:

Unendowed though we have been, you have endowed us - first and last with your faithfully renewed subscription checks. They have mattered - have mattered immensely ... They have freed us for six years from what would have crushed experiment - the necessity of the box-office appeal. But you have more beautifully and most richly endowed us with sympathy, with interest, with your presence through good bills and bad, with your appreciation, your amusement and your curiosity.<sup>2</sup>

In composition, the special nature of this audience is difficult to describe. From the small mixed Wharf Theatre audiences of New York intellectuals and holiday-makers to the much larger, more heterogeneous, uptown Garrick audiences, there was certainly a change in character. There was probably quite a difference between the small subscription audience and the larger box-office audience at all times. And information on the subject is not plentiful. But for the thirteen seasons at Macdougall Street, there were more stable, recognizable elements of the audience. The most apparent perhaps was the Village intellectual. Often seen were writers Sherwood Anderson, Jerome Blum, Waldo Frank, Norman Hapgood, Pierre Loving and William Carlos Williams; the publisher Frank Shay; and the artist Max Weber. No doubt, too, the active members not involved

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1. Troubadour (New York, 1925), p. 318.

2. 'The Provincetown Players', Leaflet, 1922. M.TC.



in a particular play or bill would fill out the untaken seats. Less welcome additions could be the neighbourhood children, or 'smudgy urchins', who sneaked in without paying and were firmly put out.<sup>1</sup>

Between 1916 and 1920 not many commercial theatre critics attended the theatre and their reviews drew few uptowners to such an out-of-the-way place. (It may have been the few uptowners who needed to be 'shushed' during the performance of Pendleton King's Cocaine in 1917 when 'lines of great violence drew the peculiar nervous laughter of those who are ill at ease'.)<sup>2</sup> After the success of The Emperor Jones, this began to change. The Village element never disappeared but to it began to be added well-known theatre artists like John Barrymore, Mrs. Fiske, Yvette Guilbert and Stanislavsky.<sup>3</sup> The critics began to attend regularly and reviews by John Anderson for example, appeared in the Post, Heywood Broun in the World, Richard Lockridge in the Sun and Alexander Woollcott in the Times. With the celebrities and the critics there came a 'society' element. Arthur Carns, Mrs. Willard Straight, Mrs. Adrian Iselin, Otto Kahn, Abram Kaplan, Mr. and Mrs. Max Morgenthau and Manny Straus were all seen. Like the Village and society elements, the rest of the uptown visitors

1. F. Vreeland, '"Brayvo!" They Cry as Robeson Rages in Emperor Jones' [1924]. Clipping, H.TC.
2. H. Broun [1917]. Clipping, H.TC.
3. Yvette Guilbert was associated with the Neighborhood Playhouse.

seem to have been predominantly intellectual, or 'cerebral' in character.<sup>1</sup>

If they appeared to one commentator as 'the largest possible example of the human race',<sup>2</sup> their appearance belied their special nature. Their enthusiasm alone for the work of the Provincetown dissipated their outward differences. If they were late and the house was full, they stood at the back among those who came in with them. For this alone, the critic Heywood Broun found them 'somewhat special'.<sup>3</sup>

Both the Provincetown and the Washington Square Players were quick to see the advantages of the subscription system. But unlike the Provincetown the Players never limited their audience to a registered membership. Having opened their productions with a show of doubtful legality in the Washington Square Bookshop in 1914, for which they charged 25 cents admission,<sup>4</sup> they moved uptown to the fully licensed Bandbox Theatre. Here they immediately offered subscriptions for sale at the same price they would be offered in the following year by the Provincetown. For \$5.00 there were five bills, but the subscription entitled the buyer to two seats at each. (They offered general admissions at the box-office for 50 cents.)<sup>5</sup>

The Players used the subscription system until they disbanded

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1. A. Woolcott, 'The New Plays', New York Times, December 14, 1919.
  2. J. Anderson, 'Two on the Aisle', New York Post, September 16, 1926.
  3. [1917]. Clipping, H.TC.
  4. See above, Chapter IV, p.140.
  5. Programme for Interior, February 19, 1915. H.TC.

in 1918. There was one major change in organization, made in 1916, when the Players moved from the Bandbox to the Comedy in which they sought a closer relationship with their audience and at the same time raised their prices to guarantee a larger income. They introduced four classes of subscriber: Class I subscribers were called Sustaining Members and paid \$100 each year in exchange for two of the best seats in the theatre at any time. Class II subscribers, or Subscribing Members, paid \$20.00 in exchange for two of the best seats at almost all entertainments the Players offered. For \$10.00 and Class III status, a Subscriber bought two good seats at all the regular bills. For \$5.00 and Class IV status, a Subscriber could have two balcony seats. Box-office admissions at up to \$2.00 gave a clear incentive for regular customers to subscribe.<sup>1</sup>

The Players, like the Provincetown, tried to give their subscribers a sense of their own importance and a feeling of belonging to a special group. For example, in a 1916 programme note the subscribers were told: 'we shall be chiefly dependent, this season as last, upon the good will of our friends and the support of our subscribers'.<sup>2</sup> The Players offered them special private performances to which the general public was not admitted, periodically invited them to meet the company socially and circularized them as frequently as the Provincetown did its

1. 'The Washington Square Players', Leaflet, 1916. NYPL.TC.

2. Programme for The Clod, January 10, 1916. Author's collection.



subscribers. The result of the system was certainly to help give the audience a core of regular and sympathetic customers. Indeed as a whole the audience was 'usually friendly and usually well-acquainted with itself'.<sup>1</sup> It was well-acquainted with the actors too: when Josephine Meyer returned to the stage in 1918 after a long absence, she was greeted by 'prolonged applause'.<sup>2</sup> In composition it was rather different from the Village-based Provincetown but the Village element was still present despite the uptown location of the theatres. Here it was the Villagers who made the pilgrimage to the theatre instead of the uptown audience. Other elements

came afoot from the literary strongholds of the East River and in limousines from the grander areas a few steps to the West. Reviewers were there from Broadway and professionals from Morningside Heights.<sup>3</sup>

There were more uptowners than ever went to Macdougall Street, but they were as intellectual in character.<sup>4</sup>

When the Theatre Guild took up the work of the Washington Square Players there were some changes in the composition of the audience. Playing in theatres like the Garrick, the Guild Theatre and theatres like the John Golden, the Martin Beck and the Biltmore,

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1. New York World, October 5, 1915. Clipping, NYPL.TC.
  2. New York Times, May 14, 1918. Clipping, NYPL.TC.
  3. New York Times, October 5, 1915. Cf. New York Telegraph, October 5, 1915. Clippings, NYPL.TC.
  4. Ibid.

the new organization always operated within the commercial theatre district and drew a more typically commercial audience than did either the Provincetown or the Players. There was a large 'carriage trade' element and advertisers in Guild programmes felt members of this audience might be persuaded to buy furs, jewelry, cigars and have their hair cared for by the most exclusive salons. One advertiser had looked closely at the potential market: 'A checkup of the Guild's subscribers reveals a great predominance of Cadillac owners. Leaders of every community naturally want the best'.<sup>1</sup> Prominent capitalists and bankers or their wives like Philip Loeb, Ralph Pulitzer, Otto Kahn, Mrs. August Belmont and Mrs. Annie Mayer were often seen here. Yet this audience was special in the same way as the audiences of the Provincetown and the Players. It was notably intellectual. It was usually composed not of

gay, carefree, amusement-seeking celebrities, but stable drama lovers ... It was a gathering of solvent, well-dressed, decent highbrows, eager to take it on the chin.<sup>2</sup>

To bring about this audience of stable character, the Theatre Guild adopted a subscription plan. Federation or co-operation was the key. - One active member, Dudley Digges, called them 'co-operative audiences':

With co-operation the secret of artistic success on the stage, the most logical accompaniment is co-operation in the audience as the secret of financial success.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Programme for Caesar and Cleopatra, April 13, 1925. NYPL.TC.
  2. P. Hammond, 'The Theatres', New York Herald Tribune, March 5, 1933.
  3. 'Co-operative Audiences', New York Evening Sun, May 3, 1920.

The subscription plan developed as it had done at the Washington Square Players'. In 1919 the Guild offered subscriptions at \$5.00 for two seats at each of two bills.<sup>1</sup> In 1921 a choice of subscribing status was made available. As at the Washington Square Players they were described as 'classes'. Class A subscribers paid \$15.00 for one orchestra seat at each of six bills; Class B cost \$12.00 for one seat at the front of the balcony; Class C \$9.00 for one balcony seat. For \$100 a subscriber could become a Sustaining Member for the season and be entitled to a five-seat box.<sup>2</sup> This system persisted throughout the 1921-1930 period. In the last year Class A subscriptions were raised to \$16.50, Class B to \$13.50 and Class C to \$10.00. General box-office admissions were available to the casual customer.

Subscriptions always meant more than simply advance financial backing. Payment of a subscription brought to the purchaser the sense of membership in a club which the Guild was keen to encourage. In addition to receiving discounts and preference in the choice of seats, the subscribers could freely attend any additional entertainments such as lectures or special bills.

The subscription idea helped create a club atmosphere at the Neighborhood Playhouse, although subscriptions were not introduced in Grand Street until 1921. Before this date a natural bond

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1. See above, Chapter IV, p. 144.

2. Programme for Ambush, October 10, 1921. NYPL.TC.



between the theatre organization and the audience derived from the neighbourhood character of the theatre in its composition and artistic policy. At first the activists in the Playhouse were amateurs, drawn from the immediate area around Grand Street and the Henry Street Settlement, just as the activists in the Provincetown were drawn mainly from Greenwich Village. They produced entertainments of interest to their neighbours which in their way were as special as the plays of political and moral ideas produced by the Provincetown for intellectual Villagers. In an immigrant area they danced, mimed, played music, explored folk ways and took up themes of universal interest. The spirit of the early street festivals where the audience might take part in the pageant, dancing and singing, was present in the Playhouse after 1915. Literally hundreds of local residents were involved in different productions in some way, from acting to sewing or lending properties.<sup>1</sup> The line between activists and audience was blurred.

After 1921, when the Playhouse had professionalized its actors and had entered into full-time production, this bond began to weaken. The neighborhood element in the audience persisted but more uptowners began to make the pilgrimage to the East Side. Just as The Emperor Jones brought critics and a wider audience to Macdougall Street, so Galsworthy's The Mob in 1920 and The Grand Street Follies of 1922 brought them down to Grand Street. But

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1. See 'Jeptha's Daughter Found', TS [1915], pp.4-5. NYPL.TC.

the Playhouse wished to preserve the relationship with its audience which it had known before 1920.

The audience has been one of the most vital and inspiring factors in the development of The Neighborhood Playhouse. For this reason, the Playhouse hopes to make the bond still closer by interesting its old friends in its new problems.<sup>1</sup>

It was to try to do this through a subscription system.

Subscription charges were never so high as at the Theatre Guild. Having gradually raised box-office admissions from a 50 cents top in 1915 to a \$1.00 top in 1919,<sup>2</sup> the Playhouse introduced subscriptions at \$5.00, or \$10.00, depending on the location of seats, for one seat at each of seven bills.<sup>3</sup> There were no more complicated offers of different classes of membership. The only changes to the system between 1921 and 1927 were adjustments to prices and the number of bills in the season.<sup>4</sup> Within the system, in addition to the normal club-like activities the Playhouse encouraged, buses were provided to take subscribers between the theatre and Times Square.

Such a system gave stability to a mixed but again predominantly intelligent audience of 'superintellectuals, artists and cranks of every description',<sup>5</sup> united, like all Art Theatre audiences, in an

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1. 'The Neighborhood Playhouse', Leaflet, 1922. NYPL.TC.
  2. See, for example, Programmes for Pippa Passes, November 17, 1917; and The Feast of Tabernacles, 1918. NYPL.TC.
  3. 'The Neighborhood Playhouse', Leaflet, 1921. NYPL.TC.
  4. See Circular, 1923. NYPL.TC.
  5. A. (Lewisohn) Crowley, The Neighborhood Playhouse: Leaves from a Theatre Scrapbook (New York, 1959), p.63.

enthusiasm for the work of their theatre.

People of the Jewish quarter, of Oriental origin, mingled with artists from the Broadway theatres, with people of the highest social standing. Often distinguished Europeans passing through New York, were to be seen there, and diplomats also. All classes were gathered in friendly sentiment in the fraternity of artists.<sup>1</sup>

Theatregoers from different classes were not so apparent at the New Theatre, much to some critics' distress. They saw only a society audience. A headline in the New York World told a full story of how, at the opening of the theatre in 1909,

From London and Even from Far-Off Boston They Came to Rejoice Yesterday with Our Own Eminent Ones that New York at Last Has Struck the Shackles of Greed from the Fair Ankles of Dramatic Art - Also to Drink Tea and Point Out Each Other.<sup>2</sup>

When the theatre produced Galsworthy's Strife, the critic Alan Dale pointed out the problem of discussing socialist ideas before such an audience as this. It was mostly so upper class that socialism was not so much offensive as incomprehensible:

Women with gleaming, bare necks, diamond strewn, sat listening to Mr. Galsworthy's tirades on trade unions and labor questions, just as they listen to the Nibelungen Ring at the Metropolitan Opera House.<sup>3</sup>

Other observers remarked on the comparison between the New Theatre and Metropolitan Opera House audiences and how in the same way they 'arrived at 9.00, left at 10.00 and talked between the times'.<sup>4</sup>

There is no doubt that the New Theatre audience possessed a

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1. Yvette Guilbert, from La Passante Émerveille. Clipping, H.TC.
  2. November 7, 1909.
  3. 'The Shrine of Snobbery'. Clipping, H.TC.
  4. 'Plays and Players', Hampton's Magazine (January, 1910).



distinctly society element, especially on subscription nights, Tuesday and Thursday, each week. And most of the founders, many of whom were associated also with the Metropolitan Opera House, may have desired it.<sup>1</sup> The managers of the theatre, however, did try to attract as wide a variety of playgoer as they could. Ames went so far as to institute cut-price performances, offering tickets for distribution to the poorest areas of New York City and he once proposed a 25% discount for students. But the high prices and high-toned atmosphere of the building and its reputation probably deterred all but the most ardent drama-lovers of the less wealthy classes. The audience was probably more homogeneous than those of the Provincetown, the Players, the Guild or the Playhouse.

Unlike any of the other Art Theatres in the group, the New Theatre sold subscriptions in perpetuity. As I have shown, \$25,000 bought a box, \$3,750 bought an orchestra seat and \$3,000 bought a seat in the front row of the balcony, all for the two subscription nights in each week. General box-office admissions were offered at a \$2.00 top.<sup>2</sup> The New Theatre encouraged the Art Theatre club atmosphere among subscribers by circularizing them regularly, informing them of new policies and any activities of interest behind the scenes. Special to the New Theatre was a free ticket delivery service. This was made possible by one of the founders,

1. E.g. Heinrich Conreid.

2. See above, Chapter IV, p.135; and see A.E. Bergh, 'The New Theatre', Columbian Magazine (December, 1909).

Clarence Mackay, director of the Postal Telegraph Company.

A society element predominated at the American Laboratory Theatre to a comparable degree. In the 1920s, critics found this fact less distressing as the idea of special audiences had become respectable, but still there were some complaints from those critics who approved of what the Laboratory was doing and wished to see its work enjoyed by a wider audience:

One regretted, as one looked the audience over, the absence of playwrights, producers, actors, and that most influential clan of theatre-goers, the patrons of Joseph LeBlang's cut-rate ticket agency.<sup>1</sup>

'The average patron of the New York stage had never heard of [this] theatre', observed the critic Roi Fricken in his article in Theatre Magazine.<sup>2</sup> Among the society names reported were Alexander Bing, Mrs. Stanley McCormick, Mr. and Mrs. Max Morgenthau, John D. Rockefeller Jr. and Eustace Seligman. From the theatre world were such celebrities as George Pierce Baker, Leo Bulgakov, Jacques Copeau, Ruth Draper, Mrs. Fiske, Adelaide George, Morris Gest and Arthur Hopkins. It was a very select audience, appearing almost 'hand-picked' to one critic.<sup>3</sup> There were rich patrons, well-known actors and producers, some intellectuals and a very few residents of the neighbourhood. The Laboratory never developed close ties with any local audience because, although it always

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1. New York Herald Tribune, February 12, 1927. Clipping, NYPL.TC.
  2. 'An Experiment in Play Production', Theatre Magazine (October, 1927).
  3. New York Herald Tribune, February 19, 1928. Clipping, NYPL.TC.

operated in residential areas, it never stayed in one place long enough to build up a regular, local clientele. In general the audience was 'highbrow' and 'friendly', the theatre's artistic policy making it especially attractive for people themselves active in the world of the theatre.<sup>1</sup>

To keep and maintain contact with its audience, the Laboratory introduced subscriptions in the normal way in 1924. At first they cost \$7.70 for one seat at each of four bills, rising to \$15.00 by 1927. General admissions, where safety laws allowed them, varied in the same period between \$1.65 and \$2.20.<sup>2</sup> In 1927 the Laboratory offered different classes of subscription, reminiscent of those offered by the Washington Square Players and the Theatre Guild. Shareholders and, later, Sustaining Members, subscribed at \$100, Endowers at \$2,500, Producing Members at \$5,000 and Founders at \$10,000.<sup>3</sup> The system adopted by the Laboratory differed from the other subscription systems in only one particular. In 1926 the subscriber received what was called a 'commutation ticket'. This was a book of ten tickets which the subscriber could use as and when he wished. He could use all ten on one evening or spread them more or less evenly over all the bills. There appears to have been no precedent for this system in New York City.

While the American Laboratory Theatre favoured subscribers

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1. New York Times, January 12, 1927. Clippings, NYPL.TC.
  2. See 'The American Laboratory Theatre', Catalogue, 1924; and Programme for The Straw Hat, October 14, 1926. NYPL.TC.
  3. See 'The American Laboratory Theatre', Catalogue, 1927. NYPL.TC.



by inviting them to meet its casts and inspect its premises behind the scenes,<sup>1</sup> the New Playwrights' Theatre offered them free copies of any New Playwrights' play. One may assume the audience of the New Playwrights to have been a close-knit, loyal group of sympathisers, in view of the radical political and artistic forms with which the theatre worked. And the theatre recognized the advantages of binding this audience as tightly as possible: 'The importance of united support from its friends is ... immeasurable'.<sup>2</sup> Subscriptions were introduced from the first. They invariably cost \$5.00 for one seat, but the number of bills offered fell from four to three in 1928.<sup>3</sup> (General box-office admissions ranged up to a \$2.50 top.)

In contrast to the audiences of both the New Theatre and the American Laboratory Theatre, there was virtually no society element here. The critic Percy Hammond found it 'an intensely Greenwich Village audience',<sup>4</sup> similar in composition to the one which frequented the Provincetown in its early days. There were artists and writers, some well-known uptown critics, intellectuals of a socialist persuasion, almost all of them 'nervously expectant friends'.<sup>5</sup> The critic Robert Littel observed 'an audience of pale, intelligent-looking young men with horn-rimmed spectacles'.<sup>6</sup> Admittedly, in

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1. See Programme for The Scarlet Letter /1927/. NYPL.TC.
  2. 'The New Playwrights' Theatre', Leaflet. NYPL.TC.
  3. Circular, October 26, 1928. NYPL.TC.
  4. 'The Theatres', New York Herald Tribune, October 21, 1927.
  5. J.B. Atkinson, New York Times, November 30, 1927. Clipping, H.TC.
  6. New York Evening Post, December 3, 1928. Clipping, H.TC.

addition to these, the New Playwrights tried to attract the ordinary working men to whom their plays were principally directed. They offered 10% discounts to workers, put tickets on sale at the offices of the Daily Worker and at the Workers' Bookshop and advertised and editorialized in the New Masses in an attempt to persuade workers to attend. But they met with little success. Their theatre remained a curiosity shop for already converted intellectuals.

Seven of the Art Theatres, then, introduced subscription systems as the basis for audience organization. The Civic Repertory, the Jewish Art and the Little theatres did not; but I would like to suggest that these theatres expressed the same ideal of the federated audience in different ways.

At the Civic Repertory Theatre, Eva Le Gallienne knew exactly what kind of audience she wished to attract. She wanted her audience to be representative of the community as a whole. Alone among the Art Theatre founders, she did not like special audiences, and she criticized the Theatre Guild in this respect:

They charge a lot of money and I do not. They have got the same idea, in that they want to present fine drama, but they have not got the idea of popular prices. This is the crux of my whole work. That is the main difference.<sup>1</sup>

For Le Gallienne, all the elements of the general public had the

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1. 'Bringing the Theatre to the People', TS, 1928. NYPL.TC. Cf. P. Hammond, 'The Theatres', New York Herald Tribune, October 14, 1928: 'The Guild's sleek and alert patrons are different from the brown students who ask for light from the 'Civic Repertory Theatre'.

right to go to the theatre. In 1926 there were theatres for Bohemians, intellectuals, immigrants, workers, socialists, people of society and so on, but it seemed to her in practice that a most important section of the community could never go to the theatre because prices were too high. These were the ordinary people of moderate means. And in her view, these people 'must not only be able to go to the theatre, but to go to it often'.<sup>1</sup> Probably because the audience was not to be thought of as special, organization became very important.

The people of moderate means were not the people who could afford to invest large sums at one time in subscriptions; and to form a privileged bloc of subscribers ran counter to the notion of a 'people's theatre'. Therefore, although subscriptions were actually offered in 1926 at \$15.00 for one seat at every bill in the season, they were soon discontinued.<sup>2</sup> Instead of subscriptions, the Civic Repertory secured the advantages of advance financial contributions and an organized audience by forming a club. For \$1.00 each year members of the Civic Repertory Theatre Club were entitled to take part in some administrative decisions at occasional general meetings, considering such problems as the composition of plays in the repertory; they had access to other entertainments offered by the theatre; and it was hoped that they would have 50% discounts on Monday and Tuesday, 20% on

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1. See above, Chapter III, p. 10.

2. S. Rathbun, New York Sun, November 13, 1926. Clipping, NYPL.TC.



Wednesday and Thursday and 10% on Friday and Saturday.<sup>1</sup> (In practice there was a general discount of about 10% on all days.) When the discount was discontinued on Saturdays in 1930, it was replaced by free monthly copies of the Civic Repertory Theatre Magazine. The number of members of the Club was always too few to enable Le Gallienne to offer the member discounts or the level of general box-office prices she intended. She had hoped to offer seats at the box-office to a 75 cents top, but between 1926 and 1931 the top only ranged between \$1.50 and \$1.65.<sup>2</sup>

To judge from such evidence as there is, Le Gallienne succeeded in attracting a very varied audience, including the people of moderate means. The critic Brooks Atkinson found it

strangely polyglot and varied - the young and the impecunious, the old and the wealthy, astringent intellectuals, maudlin sentimentalists, simple-hearted lovers of good drama, idolators and the curious.<sup>3</sup>

From the neighbourhood,

artisans ... have been known to stroll in - and in one case a mason was observed to come there with every indication of having just stopped work, and carefully lay the tools of his trade under his seat before taking in the production.<sup>4</sup>

From uptown came the 'white collar workers' and 'moderately circumstanced professionals'. From the Villages, East and West, came the 'true intelligentsia' and people of 'moderate incomes'.

1. See Boston Evening Transcript, April 26, 1928. Clipping, H.TC. Elizabeth Currier organized the membership campaign. She was to do the same for the New Playwrights' Theatre.
2. See e.g. Programme for Katerina, March 19, 1929. NYPL.TC.
3. New York Times, December 15, 1929. Clipping, H.TC.
4. New York Telegram, December 3, 1926. Clipping, H.TC.

From Park Avenue came society: 'curious, somewhat skeptical first-nighters, bewildered at finding themselves so far from the familiar Broadway scene'. From the Lower East Side came the immigrants, 'Germans, Russians, Jewish people'.<sup>1</sup> This audience was 'special' only in comparison to the Broadway audience: it was 'almost as interesting as the play, so unlike the Broadway crowd [was] it'.<sup>2</sup> As a whole it was 'volatile' and 'festive'.<sup>3</sup> The club atmosphere united the audience and over all there lay the same serious enthusiasm, apparent at almost every Art Theatre, for being in the theatre. Of all the different elements in the audience, Percy Hammond, writing in his regular column in the Herald Tribune, found there was 'a resemblance in the longings of all of them to get culture, instruction in life and amusement from the drama's deep reservoirs'.<sup>4</sup> Through the Club and by such gestures as offering free children's shows at Christmas (after 1928), the Civic Repertory kept a close and friendly contact with this audience. It was close enough for Le Gallienne to address it in 1930:

I want to thank you for proving that my faith in the American public's desire for fine plays was well grounded

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1. W. Pell, 'The New Theatre' (March, 1936), p.32. NYPL.TC.; A. Bernstein, Clipping, NYPL.TC.; and E. Le Gallienne, With a Quiet Heart (New York, 1953), p.17.
  2. W.P. Eaton, 'The Wonderful Thing the Theatre', Spur (March 15, 1927).
  3. J.B. Atkinson, New York Times, December 15, 1929 and February 15, 1931. Clippings, NYPL.TC.
  4. 'The Theatres', New York Herald Tribune, October 14, 1928.

.... We certainly will try and see to it that our standard of production will increasingly justify the faith you have shown in us.<sup>1</sup>

Instead of a club to draw the different elements of the audience closely around it, the Jewish Art Theatre possessed a natural unifying force in the language of its art. The limited number of Yiddish-speaking theatres and the small Yiddish-speaking population made for federation without the aid of special organizations like subscriptions and clubs. For the most part the theatre drew its audience from the Yiddish-speaking population of the Lower East Side. The drama itself, to a much greater extent than at the Neighborhood Playhouse, was principally of interest to the immigrant group. Two contemporary commentators wrote: 'It plays to an audience that has a culture of its own' and 'it is preoccupied with its folk emotions .... It is the expression of a folk intent on discovering itself'.<sup>2</sup>

For a time, especially in 1919 when the actors' strike closed almost all the English-speaking commercial theatres, prominent reviewers visited the relatively remote Garden Theatre and their excited reviews attracted a number of curious intellectuals and

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1. Civic Repertory Theatre Bulletin (October, 1930).
  2. New York Times, December 14, 1919; and R. Drucker, 'The Jewish Art Theatre', Theatre Arts Magazine (July, 1920), p.221.



artists of the theatre who knew no Yiddish. For their benefit there were translated synopses of the play in the programme.<sup>1</sup> But the neighbourhood, Yiddish-speaking population was always numerically far greater.<sup>2</sup> To this gathering came Yiddish-speaking intellectuals, 'the intelligentsia from the Bronx to Brooklyn'.<sup>3</sup> As an audience it seemed, in comparison with those of other theatres of the same type, to be 'unusually quiet' and 'respectful', although like that of the Civic Repertory Theatre, more volatile than those of the English-speaking, commercial theatres.<sup>4</sup>

While the Civic Repertory worked with a club and the Jewish Art Theatre with a captive audience, the Little Theatre relied mainly on its special artistic policy to form a definable group of support and to maintain contact with it. Ames sought to attract an 'intelligent' audience and seems to have succeeded. According to the New York World it was

an audience entirely composed of people engaged in the artistic professions, dilettante and sophisticated persons whose tastes are no longer tickled by the usual

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1. See L.V. De Foe, New York World, November 18, 1920; and Christian Science Monitor. Clippings, H.TC.
  2. They paid relatively high prices ranging up to a top of \$3.00. See cartoon by Hershfield, New York Evening Journal, March 10, 1920.
  3. L.V. De Foe, op.cit.
  4. L. Hirsh and M. Beer, 'An Auspicious Opening of the Jewish Art Theatre', American Jewish News, September 12, 1919.

productions of the playhouse.<sup>1</sup>

Of those engaged in the artistic professions, the producers Daniel Frohman, Al Hayman and Marc Klaw were there, actresses Jane Cowl and Laura Hope Crews and playwright Edward Sheldon. Of the dilettantes or sophisticates, prominent academics like George Pierce Baker, critics like John Corbin and bankers and capitalists like August Belmont, Robert Van Cortlandt and Cornelius Vanderbilt were often reported.<sup>2</sup>

Even Ames established a slight form of organization by his programme notes and circulars. He had a mailing list and regularly circularized his patrons with information:

Patrons who wish to have their names added to the list of those who have the optional privilege of securing seats in advance of public sale for any new production at the Little Theatre may do so by notifying the Box Office. Personal notice will then be sent them regarding any new play given.<sup>3</sup>

On occasion he actually solicited their active help in running the theatre.<sup>4</sup>

The natural conjunction of audience and theatre, which was brought about by special artistic policies and the audiences of special character they engendered was thus generally made more effective through the different kinds of organization designed to

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1. October 15 1912. Clipping, H.TC.

2. They paid \$2.50 for their tickets. C. Hamilton, 'The Advent of the Little Theatre', Bookman (May, 1912).

3. Programme for Frunella, October 27, 1913. NYPL.TC.

4. Circular, NYPL.TC.

make the contacts between the two still more easy and secure. The Art Theatres tried to give their audiences a sense of identity and of participation by addressing them in programme notes, inviting them to make comments, meet the activists and actually help run the theatres. Some of the Art Theatres had further ideas along these same lines. One was to try to turn their houses into general art-centres, where their audiences could meet at other times for other reasons than the play. They presented exhibitions of paintings, held lectures on the arts and opened bookshops.

The Washington Square Players, the Neighborhood Playhouse, the American Laboratory Theatre, the New Playwrights' Theatre, the Civic Repertory Theatre and the Jewish Art Theatre between them exhibited a number of contemporary artists, such as C. Bertram Hartman, Frances S. Stevens, R.W. Bergman, Mary Hoover and Abraham Walkowitz. Activists at the Provincetown gave lectures to the public or organized discussion forums with Provincetown plays the focus of attention. The Washington Square Players brought in prominent artists and critics of the theatre like Jacques Copeau, Ludwig Lewisohn and Walter Pritchard Eaton to talk to their subscribers, while the critic and historian Brander Matthews lectured the audience of the New Theatre. At the Laboratory, the critic John Mason Brown led a discussion forum. Almost all the Art Theatres had their own bookshops, usually found in the foyers of the theatres themselves. At the Players' Theatre it was known as 'the Bookshelf'; at the Neighborhood Playhouse, it was 'the Little Book Stall'. The New Theatre, the Little Theatre and the New Playwrights' Theatre



offered their own plays for sale; the plays of the Provincetown could be bought at the nearby Washington Square Bookshop and Frank Shay's Bookshop.

The New Theatre, the Little Theatre and the Guild Theatre were designed architecturally to provide a social atmosphere for their audiences: the New Theatre with its long galleries and refreshment and shopping facilities, the Little Theatre with its tea rooms and lounges and the Guild Theatre whose manager hoped that the attractive Galleries and Foyers ... and the Club Lounge (with its refreshment alcove) will beguile still more of our Audience to leave the Auditorium between the acts so that you may enjoy the Theatre in the way it is meant to be enjoyed.<sup>1</sup>

The Neighborhood Playhouse offered accommodation for local meetings and enterprises of all kinds. Even its roof was opened up as a children's playground.

Many of the Art Theatres published magazines or newspapers which also had the function of increasing their audiences' interest and sense of identity. The Theatre Guild for example, published the Leaf (April 1919), then the Theatre Guild Quarterly (from April 1926), which developed into the monthly Theatre Guild Magazine. The Pit appeared at the Laboratory in April 1928, followed in October 1930 by the Civic Repertory Theatre Bulletin.

Another idea of the Art Theatres was to patronize particular restaurants, known to their audiences, where players and their public could meet socially. To this end the Provincetowners were

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1. Programme for Caesar and Cleopatra, June 26, 1925. NYPL.TC.

known in the Village at Nani Bailey's, Christine's and Polly's; the Players could be found at the Hyphenated America, off Third Avenue at East 56th. Street; the members of the Playhouse visited the Traktir, later the Neighborly Inn, in Pitt Street; and, again in the Village, the Rational Vegetarian Restaurant served the New Playwrights.

So marked was the relationship between Art Theatre and audience that observers saw the theatres as 'temples of art', the audiences their 'religious communities'. Alice Lewisoyn, a director of the Neighborhood Playhouse, once compared the Provincetown to 'a Quaker Meeting House', whereas the Playhouse itself strove to become 'a cathedral of art'.<sup>1</sup> The critic Percy Hammond described the Civic Repertory's audience as 'dramatic shriners', just as he was to portray the audience of the Theatre Guild as going 'devoutly to worship at a shrine'.<sup>2</sup> In the same vein the Evening Sun called the theatre of the Washington Square Players 'the shrine of the new theatrical movement'.<sup>3</sup> And Richard Boleslavsky implied a comparison between the Laboratory and the Moscow Art Theatre when he recalled that the Moscow theatre was 'nothing but a temple'.<sup>4</sup>

In the following chapter I will consider these 'temples of art', the actual buildings which the Art Theatres seem so successfully to have converted to veritable shrines of drama.

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1. The Neighborhood Playhouse: Leaves from a Theatre Scrapbook (New York, 1959), p.102; and 'Jephtha's Daughter Found', TS [1915]. NYPL.TC.
  2. Literary Digest (November 12, 1927) Clipping, NYPL.TC.; and 'The Theatres', New York Herald Tribune, March 5, 1933.
  3. October 9, 1915.
  4. 'The Creative Theatre', TS [1923]. NYPL.TC.

## CHAPTER VII

### INTIMACY

Not an artist can be accused of 'playing to the gallery', because there ain't none!

Alan Dale, 'Little Theatre "Opens" with Critical Hearing of Galsworthy's "Pigeon"'. Clipping, NYPL.TC.



Our group of Art Theatres used quite a large number of different buildings in which to produce its plays. The outstanding characteristic of these buildings was their 'intimacy', that is to say the closeness or apparent closeness of their auditoria to their stages, a quality which normally derived from their extremely small overall size but which might also depend on such factors as the distribution of seats, the way the stage was separated from the auditorium, the shape of the auditorium, the proportions of the building and the atmosphere created by general decor. These factors could even create an intimate atmosphere within quite large buildings.

Before the advent of the Art Theatres the commercial theatre architecture was towards largeness and lavishness, both qualities which were generally opposed to the idea of intimacy. The New Amsterdam Theatre, for example, which was completed some five years before the foundations of the New Theatre were laid, was built on the grand scale. Incorporating such construction features as 'the largest steel girder ever made', the New Amsterdam was a mighty and extravagant testament to Art Nouveau:

All the wealth of the forest and plain, all the fancy of 'Midsummer Night's Dream', all the romance of Boccaccio and the 'Nibelungen Lied' have been lavished on the walls of this theatre .... No expense has been spared.<sup>1</sup>

In the 1920s, the size of the average proscenium in the commercial theatre had grown to over twenty-five feet in height and forty feet

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1. H. Herts and H. Tallant, in T. Waters, 'The New Amsterdam Theatre', Everybody's Magazine (October, 1903). Clipping, H.TC.

in width, average seating capacity to more than one thousand five hundred.<sup>1</sup> Of course there were small theatres in existence in New York City and throughout the United States. But just as large houses can be intimate, so even quite small houses can be without a truly intimate atmosphere if the necessary complementary features are absent. Before 1911, intimacy, even in the smaller houses like the Bijou, was rare. It was in the Art Theatres that we must look for the houses of smaller dimensions and the simplicity, or cosiness, of decoration.

Following the lead set by the early Art Theatres, the idea of intimate theatre found expression in a growing number of much neater but often well-equipped theatres throughout the United States. Among them were the Boston Toy Theatre, founded in 1912, seating nearly one hundred; the Little Theatre of Philadelphia, 1913, seating three hundred and thirty; the Arts and Crafts Theatre of Detroit, 1916, seating two hundred and fifty; and Plays and Players of Philadelphia, 1917, seating five hundred. Economic pressures naturally inclined newly formed theatre groups to choose modest and therefore more nearly intimate premises, in neighbourhoods where the rent was low, just as economic considerations to some extent governed the organization of their financial systems and their organization of activists and audiences. The groups often had insufficient capital to acquire premises of commercial size even if they had wanted to do so. Winthrop Ames for example once said,

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1. R.W. Sexton and B.F. Betts, eds., American Theatres of Today (New York, 1927), pp.21 ff.

'I am not a multi-millionaire, that's why I had to think about little things in building the Little Theatre. A large theatre would have been beyond my means'.<sup>1</sup> But the Art Theatres espoused the ideal of intimacy for its own sake. In their view the airy, impersonal commercial houses were mostly unsuited to the new dramas and new production techniques with which they were concerned. The Provincetown particularly wanted to

afford an opportunity ... to experiment with a stage of extremely limited resources - it being the idea of the Players that elaborate settings are unnecessary to bring out the essential qualities of a good play.<sup>2</sup>

Of the other theatres, the American Laboratory Theatre was designed to 'require very small material resources'.<sup>2</sup> Eva Le Gallienne was glad to find the 14th. Street 'intimate, yet with a fairly large capacity',<sup>3</sup> and Winthrop Ames designed his Little Theatre for the express purpose of allowing 'the close connection between actor and audience ... so important to the effect of modern plays'.<sup>2</sup> The Neighborhood Playhouse, not much bigger than the Little Theatre, was constructed so that 'ingenuity and imagination might be the directing force in all departments'.<sup>4</sup> At the largest Art Theatre of all, the New Theatre, the founders had intended to create an auditorium in which 'the farthest box at the centre of the house is no further from the performance than the last seat in the orchestra

1. New York Evening World, March 16, 1912. Clipping, NYPL.TC.

2. See above, Chapter III.

3. New York Herald Tribune, April 28, 1935. Clipping, NYPL.TC.

4. A. (Lewisohn) Crowley, The Neighborhood Playhouse: Leaves from a Theatre Scrapbook (New York, 1959), p.35.



of the usual small theatre in New York'.<sup>1</sup> As a prologue to their opening bill, to advertise their aims, the Washington Square Players surprised their audience with a dialogue between an actor on stage and actors planted in the auditorium, in the course of which they announced, 'we intend to make our playhouse as intimate as possible'.<sup>2</sup> When the Players became the Guild, they found an 'intimate theatre' in the Garrick.

The resulting compactness of the Art Theatre houses (only the New Theatre exceeded the average seating capacity of the commercial theatre) led some critics to pick out this facet as the theatres' central feature, linking them together as an 'intimate theatre movement'.<sup>3</sup>

At first, the New Playwrights looked for a small theatre outside the commercial theatre district. They found a movie theatre and offices, suitable for conversion, at 69, East Houston Street; and they looked at smaller premises at 441, East 19th. Street, both in Greenwich Village.<sup>4</sup> But, deterred by conversion costs and anxious to begin work before the 1926-27 season drew to a close, the Playwrights opted for the vacant 52nd. Street Theatre,

1. Carrere and Hastings, 'The New Theatre', TS, February 20, 1908. H.TC.

2. Philip Moeller, in 'From Greenwich Village', Boston Transcript, February 22, 1915.

3. L.V. De Foe, 'The Intimate Theatre Has Gone the Way of Other Fads', New York World, November 10, 1918. Here he discussed the Little Theatre, the Provincetown and the Washington Square Players.

4. See G. Knox and H. Stahl, Dos Passos and the Revolting Playwrights (Uppsala, 1964), pp.211-13.

formerly known as the Berkeley. It was located at 306, West 52nd. Street, far enough West of Broadway to be considered outside the commercial theatre district and describing itself as 'across Eighth Avenue from the Theatre Guild'.<sup>1</sup> In only two months the Playwrights had abandoned the 52nd. Street for Greenwich Village. Although it was small in comparison to the commercial houses, it was still too expensive for the Playwrights to maintain at less than capacity. Nor did it offer any workshop facilities which the Playwrights were keen to have.<sup>2</sup>

The theatre to which they temporarily removed, at 22, Grove Street, was extremely small. Here they performed in the converted ground floor rooms of a brownstone house and they were to return to them once more before they disbanded.

In the season 1927-28 the Playwrights were uninterruptedly at the Cherry Lane Theatre.<sup>3</sup> Close to Grove Street, the Cherry Lane was located at 40, Commerce Street. It had been converted to a theatre in 1924 by a certain William C. Rainey who, along with

1. Programme for Caesar and Cleopatra, April 13, 1925. NYPL.TC.
2. See 'The New Playwrights' Theatre', Leaflet, 1928. NYPL.TC.; New York World, February 5, 1928. NYPL.TC.; and M. Goldstein, 'Theatrical Insurgency in Pre-Depression America', Theatre Survey, 2 (1961), pp.35ff., in which he writes: 'they were there /in Greenwich Village/ in spirit from the outset, alongside the Provincetown, the Greenwich Village Theatre, the Neighborhood Playhouse, the Civic Repertory Theatre /sic/ - the "art theatres"'.
3. The name 'Cherry Lane' was simply invented by its founders, although the New York press gave credence to a story, put about by the founders, that Commerce Street had originally been called 'Cherry Lane' on account of the trees which had once grown there, and was so marked on the earliest plans of the city.

George Cram Cook and Edna St. Vincent Millay of the Provincetown group, had long harboured the idea of converting the whole of the picturesque street, which was 'reminiscent of the Parisian Latin Quarter', into an 'art colony'.<sup>1</sup> With its crumbled red brick and exposed fire escapes, the one hundred year old building at number 40 could not be described as attractive in itself. It was no more pleasing inside. A small lobby opened directly into a single level auditorium of very plain character. The walls and ceiling were finished in featureless, painted plaster. A centre aisle divided one hundred and eighty-seven seats on a steeply raked floor.<sup>2</sup> The ventilation system was very inefficient.<sup>3</sup> Alan Dale found his duty to review plays there most unpleasant: he said it was

a theatre that looked worse than we are popularly expected to suppose that a house of entertainment should look. That is the trouble with these 'little theatres' so-called. In their silly quest of Bohemianism and squalor, they go to the limit, and when a play occurs that, in a happier and less disgruntled environment, might really stamp itself upon one's memory, it is viewed with every discomfort and distress .... It irks me to sit amid such surroundings in this hyper-opulent city and pretend that I am having a good time seeing any presentation.<sup>4</sup>

No doubt the New Playwrights would have liked to be able to provide their audiences with plush seats, but if they could not do this, they

1. Clipping, NYPL.TC.

2. Clipping, NYPL.TC. Cf. G. Knox and H. Stahl, Dos Passos and the Revolting Playwrights (Uppsala, 1964), p.79: Otto Kahn believed there to be 300 seats.

3. J.B. Atkinson, New York Times, October 20, 1927. Clipping, NYPL.TC.

4. American (November 30, 1927). Clipping, NYPL.TC.



succeeded in giving them intimacy. So much so that another critic, Brooks Atkinson, actually viewed his proximity to the stage with fear:

Unless the theatregoer clings to the arms of his chair, he is likely to be catapulted onto the stage at any moment.<sup>1</sup>

The stage was raised some three feet above the auditorium with a small proscenium opening of eighteen feet. Critic Leonard Hall commented:

A healthy Charleston dancer of the Bee Palmer model could kick both sides of the proscenium without straining even a ligament.<sup>2</sup>

By the end of the 1927-28 season the New Playwrights found that even the Cherry Lane Theatre was costing too much to maintain and they abandoned it for a small suite of rooms at 133, West 14th. Street, from which they could hire a proper theatre whenever they had sufficiently prepared a production. In this way they moved temporarily to the Provincetown at 133, Macdougall Street and back to 22, Grove Street for short runs, the former as part of a Provincetown subscription season.

The New Playwrights were alone in moving from larger to smaller theatres. Most of the Art Theatres, including the Provincetown, improved their facilities by expanding into larger and better

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1. New York Times, October 20, 1927. Clipping, NYPL.TC.
  2. New York Telegram, November 30, 1927. Cf. A. Woolcott, New York World, October 20, 1927. Clippings, NYPL.TC.

equipped premises while trying still to preserve an intimate atmosphere. The Provincetown, like the New Playwrights, was to be found in a number of different premises, but for the great majority of its active seasons, the group was at 133, Macdougall Street. This theatre, a conversion like the Cherry Lane, was only slightly larger and just as intimate.

Before arriving at 133, Macdougall Street, the group had worked in even more modest surroundings: first in Provincetown itself. There was a private performance in a 'member's' house, followed by two summer seasons in what had once been a fish house at the end of a Provincetown wharf belonging to another 'member' of the group, Mary Heaton Vorse. This property had already been given over to artistic enterprise: it was then being used by Margaret Steele, an artist and close friend of George Cram Cook. Its situation was off Commercial Street, about a mile from the centre of town, on the mainland side.<sup>1</sup> Built entirely of wood, it was converted into a simple theatre with a stage only twelve feet wide and ten feet deep and with an auditorium large enough for about ninety spectators.

In 1916 the members of the Provincetown decided to continue their work in New York City. For a while they settled in 139, Macdougall Street, in the heart of Greenwich Village, on the corner of Washington Square, for which they paid an initial rent

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1. A plaque marks the spot today. For some of the different descriptions of these premises, see A. and B. Gelb, Eugene O'Neill (London, 1962), pp.307ff.; H. Deutsch and S. Hanau, The Provincetown: A Story of the Theatre (1931; rpt. New York, 1959), pp.8ff.; W. Vilhauer, 'A History and Evaluation of the Provincetown Players', Diss. University of Iowa 1965, pp.36ff.; and O. Sayler, 'The Playwrights' Theatre', Drama (October, 1921), p. 26. There is also a model of the building in the Provincetown Museum.

of \$50.00 per month. Like 22, Grove Street, number 139 was a brownstone house converted into a serviceable theatre by opening up the two large ground floor rooms.<sup>1</sup> Here there was space for a stage some ten and a half feet in width and fourteen feet in depth, facing an auditorium with a capacity of perhaps one hundred and fifty. Access to the first floor was added later.

After only two years the group decided to move again. Its members wanted a better equipped theatre to do more justice to their growing artistic standards, and, more particularly, the Fire Department was harassing them about a gas stove in the auditorium and about the state of the electrical wiring. In 1918 the group received an offer of financial assistance. Unlike the New Playwrights therefore, who moved from larger to smaller premises, the Provincetown began to look for a larger stage. They found it just a few doors down Macdougall Street, away from Washington Square, at number 133. From outside the four storey building looked no more like a theatre than did number 139.<sup>2</sup> It had been a storehouse, a bottling works and latterly a stable. Even after the Provincetown group had finished its conversion, the large stable doors were left intact and when the wind blew strongly in the winter during performances, local children were paid to hold them shut. (A trap-door, let into the pavement, gave access to the basement.) Behind

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1. The Provincetown was prosecuted and reproved for illegal alterations. For descriptions of these premises, see e.g. A. and B. Gelb, op.cit., pp.315ff.; H. Deutsch and S. Hanau, op.cit., pp.18ff.; W. Vilhauer, op.cit., pp.63ff.; and C.D'A. Mackay, The Little Theatre in the United States (New York, 1917), pp.48ff.

2. See above, Chapter III.



the doors, there was a small box-office cubicle. Here the remains of a wooden ramp gave the small lobby a floor which sloped up to the inner doors, opening directly into the back of a single-level auditorium. The walls and ceiling were plastered and painted white. On one wall the Players incorporated a large hitching ring in the decoration, just as they had used nets and marine artifacts to ornament their Wharf Theatre. In the redecoration of 1923, Robert Edmund Jones added elaborate wall-lights of 'tin sheeting and beer bottle tops'.<sup>1</sup> The auditorium floor was raked to improve sight-lines. The overall size was larger than before: here there was seating for some two hundred spectators. There were the same benches from 139, but now they had backs and cushions and were slightly wider-spaced.<sup>2</sup> In general the critics found them as uncomfortable as they found the seats at the Cherry Lane Theatre. John Anderson said

It used to be quite a business to know how to sit in them. If short, the playgoer, as likely as not, slid through the slot in the back and onto the floor, where he might have been kicked around for several minutes before anybody noticed it. If tall, he slithered about upon his neighbors ... and left his feet trailing in the aisles .... In brief it had all the comforts of the subway.<sup>3</sup>

The apron stage, which was extended into the auditorium in

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1. H. Deutsch and S. Hanau, The Provincetown: A Story of the Theatre (1931; rpt. New York, 1959), p.101.
  2. W. Vilhauer, 'A History and Evaluation of the Provincetown Players', Diss. University of Iowa 1965, p.131.
  3. 'Two on the Aisle', New York Post, September 16, 1926.

1923, added to the intimacy which the size, decoration and single-level arrangement of the auditorium had already suggested. The stage measured twenty-six feet wide by twelve feet deep. Other notable features were two proscenium doors (after 1923), a large slot at the rear of the stage allowing scenery to be taken readily from the basement and (after 1920) a kuppelhorizonte, or dome-shaped plaster cyclorama. This kuppelhorizonte was an important technical innovation for the American theatre though not the very first, as some historians have claimed.<sup>1</sup> The disposition of lighting equipment was also experimental. The Provincetown numbered among those theatres which were beginning to favour overhead lighting in place of overhead and footlights. Here twelve spotlights set in the ceiling of the auditorium supplemented the usual light sources above and to the sides of the stage. Footlights were used mainly for special effects.<sup>2</sup> For all this space, including the basement workshops, storage rooms, dressing rooms and the first floor restaurant, club room and offices, the Provincetown paid \$400 per month rent.<sup>3</sup>

In 1929 the group was looking once more for a large stage, facing similar pressures to those which were responsible for the move of 1918: its members felt that their artistic standards were thwarted by inadequate facilities. The departments of Fire and

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1. See W. Vilhauer, 'History and Evaluation of the Provincetown Players', Diss. University of Iowa 1965, p.290. The Neighborhood Playhouse, for example, already had one.

2. Ibid, p.283.

3. H. Deutsch and S. Hanau, The Provincetown: A Story of the Theatre (1931; rpt. New York, 1959), p.131.

Building were pressing them to make expensive alterations to improve the safety of their theatre. In addition, they were running a debt of more than \$15,000 and looked to a large house to offset their expenditure. When the offer of help to move came along in the spring of 1929, they looked at a number of premises, among them the Greenwich Village Theatre, the 8th. Street Theatre and a church suitable for conversion, all close at hand. But they decided to move uptown to the Garrick Theatre at 65, West 35th. Street, because of its greater audience potential.<sup>1</sup> It possessed facilities which were not common to commercial houses and which the Provincetown required, namely space for offices, workshop and storage. Technically it was old but up to professional standards and it was relatively cheap to rent for an uptown house. It had an association with Art Theatre, with the Theatre Guild for example whose house it had been between 1919 and 1925 and, as the Guild had found, it combined a fair size with genuine intimacy (it accommodated five hundred and thirty-seven in orchestra and single balcony). Unfortunately the logic of expansion to restore economic balance was flawed. The additional expenses of the larger theatre increased the deficit of \$15,000 to \$25,000 by December 1929. Rather than incur further debts, the group disbanded.

At least as many different theatres witnessed the work of the

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1. 'The Provincetown Players', Minutes, April 26, 1929. NYPL.TC. For more details of the Garrick Theatre, see 'The Garrick Theatre', in W.C. Young, ed., Documents of American Theatre History (Chicago, 1973); W.P. Eaton, The Theatre Guild: The First Ten Years (New York, 1929), pp.31ff.; and T. Helburn, A Wayward Quest (Boston, 1960), pp.70ff.



American Laboratory Theatre. Indeed the Laboratory, in some eight years, converted more premises into theatres than any other Art Theatre group. Like the Provincetown, the Laboratory began in the most modest circumstances and progressed to the tenancy of a larger theatre which seated more than two hundred and fifty spectators. It began work in 1923 in a large apartment over a restaurant at 80, East 60th. Street, for which the rent was \$180 per month.<sup>1</sup> Early in 1924 the group moved to temporary accommodation at Park Avenue and 80th. Street, the home of one of its members, after vigorous dancing classes had collapsed the ceiling of the restaurant below. The group looked for permanent quarters around the Upper East Side, but lack of available space drove its members downtown to 139, Macdougall Street, the very theatre which the Provincetown had converted and had left empty in 1918. It seems that little but the fundamental Provincetown improvements remained for the Laboratory had to start anew with the problems of seating.<sup>2</sup>

The prevailing need for larger premises for classes and a more suitable performance stage, coupled perhaps with the desire of the leaders of the group to withdraw from the Greenwich Village neighbourhood while their art was being perfected, took the Laboratory far up the West Side to the old La Salle School building at 107, West 58th. Street at Central Park West. For \$350 per month, the Laboratory

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1. R. Willis, 'The American Laboratory Theatre: 1923-1930', Diss. University of Iowa, 1968. pp.48ff.

2. See Blanche Tancock, in *ibid*, pp.82-83.

came into possession of a smaller auditorium seating ninety-eight but with much more additional space to use for workshop, offices, classes and rehearsal.<sup>1</sup>

Having invested quite large sums in alterations and equipment for La Salle, the members of the Laboratory received notice that their building was listed for demolition. Undeterred, they proceeded to repeat their error of wasting money on improvements at their still larger premises at 145, East 58th. Street, the lease of which was again subject to a three month eviction clause. Here again they altered and equipped the building (at a cost of about \$9,000) turning it into a one hundred and seventy-five seat theatre. Then they abandoned it, not because they were evicted but because they found that in practice there was not enough space for all they wanted to do.<sup>2</sup>

In 1927 the Laboratory at last settled into premises which seemed likely to satisfy its needs of the present and at least immediate future. The theatre was now at 222, East 54th. Street between the elevated tracks of Second and Third Avenues, ironically not so very far from where it had started life in 1923 and at as great a distance from the commercial theatre district. Some critics complained of getting lost looking for it, most were impressed by its obscurity:

You are away from Broadway; beyond the altitudinous and self-conscious wealth of Park Avenue; beyond even the

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1. See 'The American Laboratory Theatre', Catalogue, 1924. NYPL.TC.

2. See 'The American Laboratory Theatre', Catalogue, 1927. NYPL.TC.

Third Avenue 'El'; and come to an indeterminate and, so to say, neutral and anonymous neighborhood of garages, stables and dimly lit little shops.<sup>1</sup>

Externally, the building's previous identity as a brewery was well disguised. A permanent pavement canopy advertised its new purpose. It appeared an 'unpretentious, buff-brick building, with its neat lettered sign before the box office'.<sup>2</sup> Inside, the 'trim and freshly plastered auditorium' looked 'Italian', of undisclosed period.<sup>3</sup> It was relatively high in its proportions, being thirty feet in height to thirty-six in width. This was brought about by the process of alteration when the ground and first floors were combined by removing most of the flooring. (The remaining section at the rear of the auditorium was purposely left for use as a balcony.) The orchestra floor inclined to four feet at the back and held most of the two hundred and fifty-four seats.<sup>4</sup> The proscenium opening measured sixteen feet high and twenty-two feet wide. The stage, raised two feet above the orchestra floor, was thirty-six feet wide and twenty-eight feet deep. On the premises were classrooms, library, reading room, offices and workshop, bringing the overall modification

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1. A. Ruhl, 'Second Nights', New York Herald, January 26, 1930.
  2. M.F. Nichel, 'Nucleus of National Stage Seen in East Side Laboratory Theatre', New York Tribune, November 3, 1930. And see above, Chapter III.
  3. New York Times, November 19, 1927. Clipping, NYPL.TC.
  4. 'The American Laboratory Theatre', Catalogue, 1928. NYPL.TC. The number of seats was increased subsequently to two hundred and ninety-nine.



costs before occupation to \$32,266.59. The rent was \$750 per month.<sup>1</sup>

The large building costs incurred by the Provincetown and the Laboratory in their quest for well-equipped, intimate premises were inconsiderable in comparison with the outlays of the Little Theatre. Winthrop Ames had been impressed by dramas presented in intimate theatres in Europe, and felt keenly that the same dramas suffered in New York where there were no well-equipped small theatres to house them. He therefore decided to build an intimate theatre within the theatre district of the best quality he could afford. When New York's genuinely intimate theatre opened in 1912, it had cost him \$181,500.<sup>2</sup>

The theatre stood at 240, West 44th. Street, the site on which the founders of the New Theatre had intended to build a small theatre after their first venture had failed. It was very much on the fringes of the commercial theatre district in 1912, close to 8th. Avenue, and to get to it was, as the critic Alan Dale put it,

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1. See R. Willis, 'The American Laboratory Theatre: 1923-1930', Diss. University of Iowa 1968, pp.183-86.

2. Excluding land. The costs broke down as follows:

Building and fees	\$130,200
Stage equipment	8,400
Electricals	12,500
Light equipment	3,200
Heating and ventilation	8,200
Auditorium seats	3,200
Furniture and decor	15,800.

'a hideous approach unless you do it in an auto or a taxi - and take my tip, do it!'<sup>1</sup> Even Ames had to be careful in his choice of site. In comparison to the New Amsterdam theatre mentioned above for example, the Little Theatre was extremely simple, small and unimposing and its visitors were quick to notice its unique qualities:

Here is no strained and tortured imitation of the Greek or adaptation of the Romanesque, no puffed and tumid rococo, no meretricious, glittering art nouveau.<sup>2</sup>

Outside it was 'lovely in unobtrusive dignity'. There were no garish signs but, instead, an 'artistry and sense of elegance'.<sup>3</sup>

The exterior was decidedly different from the usual conceptions of theatre façades. There were no masks, scrolls and trumpets with which theatrical architects were so fond of decorating the façades of their buildings.<sup>4</sup>

It was Colonial in style: the walls were finished in red brick and pointed in white cement, from which there hung lanterns and the swinging oval theatre sign. Every window had green-painted shutters and beneath those on the first floor were tasteful evergreen shrubs. Four white pillars flanked the main doors, between which were two

1. 'Little Theatre "Opens" with Critical Hearing of Galsworthy's "Pigeon"', March 12, 1912. Clipping, H.TC.
2. C. Hamilton, 'The Advent of the Little Theatre', Bookman (May, 1912).
3. Ibid; and H.T. Parker, Boston Transcript, March 12, 1912. Clipping, H.TC.
4. D. MacArthur, 'A Study of the Theatrical Career of Winthrop Ames: 1904-1929', Diss. Ohio State University 1962, pp.118-99.

modest bill cases. Concealed lighting softly lit the whole façade by night.<sup>1</sup>

To enter the lobby was as if to enter a 'private dwelling', an effect achieved by a profusion of wood panelling and a welcoming log fire. Reaching the auditorium the visitor of 1912 would have been struck by the absence of balconies and boxes. This was the first house the majority of New York theatregoers would have seen in which the steeply raked orchestra floor held all the two hundred and ninety-nine seats.<sup>2</sup> The room as a whole measured forty-eight feet in length, forty-nine in width, twenty-eight in height at the front, twenty-three feet in height at the rear. Fifteen rows of seats were divided into three sections by two aisles.<sup>3</sup> According to the Brooklyn Citizen, the seats, upholstered in leather, were the roomiest of any in the city. They were all close to the stage and no structural supports intervened to spoil their occupiers' view of the actors.<sup>4</sup> Critics used such expressions as 'chastely decorated', 'the effect of a private salon', 'like a private drawing room' and even 'a lecture room in a medical college' to describe the immediate effect of the simple decor.<sup>5</sup> The ceiling

1. See above, Chapter III. And see New York Herald, March 12, 1912; C. Pollock (May, 1912); and H.T. Parker, Boston Transcript, March 12, 1912. Clippings, H.TC.
2. Cf. Journal of Commerce, March 12, 1912. Clipping, H.TC.
3. D. MacArthur, 'A Study of the Theatrical Career of Winthrop Ames: 1904-1929', Diss, Ohio State University 1962, p.200.
4. December 31, 1911. Clipping, H.TC.
5. See Current Literature (May 1912); and A. Davies, 'The Little Theatre Wins Laurels for Mr. Ames'. Clippings, H.TC.



was white with plaster arabesques in relief around the circumference, from which hung two chandeliers to either side. The curving side walls were panelled in wood and draped with tapestries for acoustic as well as decorative effects. The curving rear wall was panelled with acoustic felt. Within the wood-panelled proscenium arch, the outer draw curtain matched the wall tapestries. There was an inner drop curtain of blue velvet and an asbestos drop of painted blue.<sup>1</sup> In this, Ames certainly achieved the intimacy he sought. Clayton Hamilton announced 'The Advent of the Little Theatre' and said:

We find ourselves mystically a part. We do not watch a play; but a play happens to us. We are not spectators, but participants.<sup>2</sup>

And another critic, Acton Davies, observed:

It is an ideal home for comedy, or in fact any class of intimate plays, for every whisper on the stage can be heard in every seat in the house.<sup>3</sup>

Behind the curtains the technical equipment was in many ways more advanced than at any large, commercial theatre. The proscenium opening was thirty feet wide and eighteen feet high; the stage seventy-five feet wide, thirty feet deep and fifty-eight feet below the rig. A revolve took up most of the stage floor - the only other in New York could be found at the New Theatre. Ames installed an advanced, counter-weight flying system which he had

1. See D. MacArthur, 'A Study of the Theatrical Career of Winthrop Ames: 1904-1929', Diss. Ohio State University 1962, pp.200ff.; New York Herald, March 12, 1912; and H.T. Parker, Boston Transcript, March 12, 1912. Clippings, H.TC.

2. Bookman (May, 1912).

3. 'The Little Theatre Wins Laurels for Mr. Ames', Clipping, H.TC.

also introduced at the New Theatre but which was not generally in use. Among its other experimental features were a downstage lighting bridge, remote control lighting and spotlights set in the auditorium.<sup>1</sup>

Other facilities in the building included a refreshment lounge and gentlemen's smoke room for public use; on the first floor, business offices; on the second floor, dressing rooms, a green room and Ames' own residential apartment. The green room was an unusual feature in this period; most commercial theatres had pressed this space into other use. There is evidence that economic difficulties, to which the small seating capacity certainly contributed, forced Ames to consider increasing the number of seats by adding a balcony in 1915.<sup>2</sup> In fact he took no action and persisted with the Little Theatre until further losses persuaded him to lease it off to a commercial producer in 1917.

One critic had called the Little Theatre a 'Colonial bandbox'.<sup>3</sup> There was soon to be an actual Bandbox Theatre at 205, East 57th Street, intimate house of the Washington Square Players. The Players, like the New Playwrights, did not really wish to lease an uptown theatre: after their first 'performance' in the backroom

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1. See A.E. Krows, Equipment for Stage Production (New York, 1928), p.7

2. See Variety, April 30, 1915. Clipping, NYPL.TC.

3. New York Herald, March 12, 1912. Clipping, H.TC.

of the Washington Square Bookshop, they looked for more suitable premises around the Village. In November, 1914, Lawrence Langner sent out a circular letter to invite active members to consider new quarters at 47, Washington Square or 134, Macdougall Street.<sup>1</sup> And Moritz Jagendorf, director of the Free Theatre on East 107th Street, advised them against moving further afield: 'once your idea is taken out of Greenwich Village it degenerates'.<sup>2</sup> The Players decided to settle at 139, Macdougall Street, the same brownstone house to which both the Provincetown and American Laboratory Theatre would come later. They began work on conversion but difficult relations with their landlady, legal problems and a growing feeling that the scale of the building would be too small induced them to abandon it and risk their ideas and organization uptown at the slightly more ambitious Bandbox Theatre.

East 57th. Street was described in 1915 as a 'genial, if distant neighborhood'.<sup>3</sup> The theatre from the outside was not particularly notable. One critic did describe it as 'aesthetic' but it never received so much attention when it opened in 1914 as Ames' house had done.<sup>4</sup> The Bandbox was much the same size as the Little Theatre. It had the same number of seats, similarly

1. TS, November 11, 1914. NYPL.TC.

2. Letter from Morra [Moritz Jagendorf] to Edward Goodman, December 19, 1914. NYPL.TC.

3. Clipping, NYPL.TC.

4. '"Sea Gull" Scores at Dainty Bandbox', Brooklyn Eagle, May 23, 1916. And see above, Chapter III.



distributed on the orchestra floor. There were boxes but no balcony. (In fact Langner admitted that the Bandbox and other theatres of similar size owed their existence to 'Winthrop Ames who built the Little Theatre'.)<sup>1</sup> Like the Little Theatre, it was notable for 'the intimacy maintained between the theatre and the stage'.<sup>2</sup> But although it was technically up to professional standard, it was not so well equipped. And for the \$35.00 rent for two nights each week, later \$1,000 for the month, it was a grimy, drafty place. The actress Helen Westley recalled 'those dirty evenings backstage, where you bumped into cobwebs'.<sup>3</sup>

After one and a half seasons the Players moved to the larger Comedy Theatre at 110, West 41st. Street, within the commercial theatre district. They set out their reasons for moving in the press:

Further progress at the Bandbox would be difficult, if not impossible, due to the inadequate storage space and because the small seating capacity has limited the Players financially and therefore artistically.<sup>4</sup>

It was a larger house seating seven hundred spectators, but the Players were quick to state, as Art Theatres commonly did when they expanded, that it would 'allow the company to maintain the intimate atmosphere necessary to its work'.<sup>5</sup> Across the street they acquired a seven-floor building for their offices, workshop,

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1. The Magic Curtain (New York, 1952), pp.91-92.
  2. New York Tribune, December 20, 1914.
  3. In D. Barnes, 'The Washington Square Players', New York Morning Telegraph, December 3, 1916.
  4. Edward Goodman, in C. Baker, 'Wonder ....', New York Review (June 10, 1916).
  5. 'The Washington Square Players: Announcement', 1916. NYPL.TC.

clubroom and school classrooms which they maintained for two further seasons before the organization disbanded.

While the Washington Square Players improved their facilities from the Washington Square Bookshop to the Comedy Theatre, the Neighborhood Playhouse was the culmination for another Art Theatre group of a similar phase of expansion. The precursors of the Neighborhood Players performed in the gymnasium of the Henry Street Settlement and sometimes in the street itself. The Players then hired a local social centre, Clinton Hall, for the actual performance nights of their plays, before looking round for a still more suitable stage. Clinton Hall was not a theatre and could not readily be altered, and it began to inhibit improvement of their standards. Their search for a more adequate stage was unsuccessful, since there appeared to be no other local building suitable for conversion. It was then that the Lewisohn sisters offered to provide a theatre from their own resources.<sup>1</sup> To design the new building they engaged the architects Harry Creighton Ingalls and F. Burrell Hofman, Jr., the same firm which had created the Little Theatre for Winthrop Ames two years previously. The plans were approved in 1914.

The Playhouse opened in 1915 at 466, Grand Street, a place

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1. See A. (Lewisohn) Crowley, The Neighborhood Playhouse: Leaves from a Theatre Scrapbook (New York, 1959), pp.32ff.

like many of the locations of the New Playwrights, the Provincetown, the Laboratory and the Players

so absurdly far ... [from] Broadway that on your way there each time you are reminded how wide is this island in some of its latitudes.<sup>1</sup>

From the street, the house was described as 'Georgian' in appearance, and it is easy to see similarities with the 'Colonial' Little Theatre.<sup>2</sup> There was the same red brickwork, the same green window shutters, black ironwork lanterns, window boxes and ever-green shrubs, even the same style of oval, swinging theatre sign. The second floor, set back, was finished in stucco. Through the main doors the small entry with its floor in black and white tile opened into the main lobby. Here there was a large, carved wooden panel by the artist Jo Davidson, descriptive of the art of the dance. The auditorium was

planned for utmost simplicity ... Decorative values were indicated merely through architectural proportions, the use of materials and the play of light and shade produced by a special system of indirect lighting.<sup>3</sup>

It gave 'an impression of spaciousness because of its proportion and the simplicity of its treatment.'<sup>4</sup> But the same proportions and decoration created 'an atmosphere of intimacy between audience and stage'.<sup>5</sup> The plain, white-panelled walls were relieved by

1. 'Dunsany's New Play', April 24, 1916. Clipping, H.TC.
2. February 7, 1915. Clipping, H.TC. And see above, Chapter III.
3. A. (Lewisohn) Crowley, The Neighborhood Playhouse: Leaves from a Theatre Scrapbook (New York, 1959), pp.32ff.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid., p.64.



wrought iron lighting brackets set into the corners, the panels picked out in black. The wainscot, in reverse, was predominantly black with panelling picked out in white. On the orchestra floor of grey cement there were three hundred seats, finished in polished black wood. Ninety-nine more in the single small balcony made for a total seating capacity of three hundred and ninety-nine.<sup>1</sup> The overall stage area measured fifty feet in width and twenty-five feet in depth, backed by the first kuppelhorizonte in New York City. There was no fly space. Lighting seems to have been concentrated over the stage with the exception of the footlights which were fixed to the rail of the orchestra pit. On the first and second floors there were two dressing rooms, bathroom, make-up room, green room, cloakroom, kitchenette, library and additional rooms for classes, rehearsals and the manufacture and storage of properties and costumes.

Few alterations were made to the \$150,000 Playhouse between 1915 and 1927.<sup>2</sup> In 1916-17 the group added neighbouring premises at 8, Pitt Street to which the expanding workshops were transferred, but the theatre remained substantially the same. The need to change premises however was often felt. As early as 1922, the group discussed the possibility of expanding seating capacity. Heavy expenditure on productions demanded a larger income through the box office but the theatre was remote from the large commercial

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1. But cf. C. D'A. Mackay, who states the total was four hundred and eleven. The Little Theatre in the United States (New York, 1917), pp.54ff.

2. Including land. See 'The Neighborhood Playhouse', in T.H. Dickinson, The Insurgent Theatre (New York, 1917).

audience and, when particularly successful plays attracted customers from a distance, the limited number of seats prevented the theatre from capitalizing on its success. In 1927 the Playhouse group planned to move to the Little Theatre which had managed to increase its seating capacity since the time when Ames had produced there.<sup>1</sup> This plan fell through and the group went on to produce only the occasional show in subsequent seasons at such commercial houses as the Mecca Temple and the Manhattan Opera House.

All but one of the producing groups I have considered so far worked for some time at least with extremely primitive stages in buildings which had not been designed as theatres. They converted a stable, a fish house, a brewery, a school and a number of private houses to their purpose. But there were Art Theatres other than the Little Theatre which never resorted to makeshift stages. The Theatre Guild, the Civic Repertory Theatre, the Jewish Art Theatre and the New Theatre all worked with generally larger and better equipped theatres. They did so without being any the less conscious about their ideals of intimacy.

From its foundation the Theatre Guild looked for a theatre equipped to professional standards. Its members looked at Daly's Theatre on Fifth Avenue for example, left empty by the northward trend of the commercial theatre district, but they thought it too

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1. J.B. Atkinson, 'The End of an Era', New York Times, May 29, 1927.

costly to lease and run. Fortunately they succeeded in interesting a theatre leaseholder in their plans and took the Garrick Theatre on favourable terms. On the periphery of the commercial theatre district and of modest size, the Garrick had strong Art Theatre associations to which the Guild contributed for some six seasons coming as they did between the tenancies of Jacques Copeau and the Provincetown.<sup>1</sup> Here the pattern of rising artistic ambitions and the economic restrictions of a relatively small theatre which imprinted itself on so many of the Art Theatres was repeated.<sup>2</sup> The group, like the Neighborhood Playhouse, decided to build:

The keynote of the Theatre will be its simplicity. The Theatre will be characterized by its lack of gilt decorations and gimcrack ornaments, and the money usually spent for ornate display will be employed in providing the Theatre with the best technical equipment .... It is expected that the Theatre will seat an audience of about eleven hundred, disposed in as intimate relation to the stage as modern theatre design will permit.<sup>3</sup>

John Corbin, a critic and once an associate of Winthrop Ames, wondered whether the capacity was not too big for an Art Theatre, but the plans went ahead and the new Guild Theatre opened in 1925 at 245, West 52nd. Street.<sup>4</sup> Within the commercial theatre district it was considered 'a little removed from Broadway', down 'a narrow side street', by some critics, as was Ames' Little Theatre, the

1. See above, p.247, especially footnote 1.

2. See 'A Guild Theatre for the Theatre Guild', Leaflet, March 4, 1923. NYPL.TC.

3. Ibid.

4. 'The Theatre Guild Expands', New York Times, March 11, 1923. The Architects were Messrs. C. Howard Crane, Kenneth Franzheim and Charles H. Bettis.



Players' Comedy and the Garrick of the Provincetown and Guild.<sup>1</sup>

Its style was 'Florentine Renaissance' without precedent in New York's theatre architecture, and was well received:

By day or night the front of the Guild Theatre makes sufficient impression. The smooth white surfaces engage the eye and meet it brightly. The green shutters seem as regular and necessary dashes of color. An occasional balcony provides the complementary irregularity.<sup>2</sup>

The Italian style was carried through to the interior. Past the beam-vaulted outer lobby, the 'lounge', or inner lobby, with its rough white plaster walls, its 'cantaglorias' converted into mirrors and richly coloured carpets and wrought ironwork, produced a distinctly Italian effect. Visitors especially noticed the spaciousness of the public rooms in 'direct and vivacious defiance of most American custom in theatre planning'.<sup>3</sup> There was a lower lounge, refreshment bar, smokeroom, ladies' lounge and cloakroom. On the first floor, a private lounge was provided for the Guild subscribers alongside the main administrative offices. On the second and third floors there were rooms for rehearsal, workshop and storage. To the right of the lobby, stairs led to the orchestra floor. The roof of the auditorium was white with wooden beams colourfully decorated. The walls were finished in rough plaster, topped with a frieze which carried the images of characters featured in past Guild productions, members of the Guild administration and

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1. H.T. Parker, 'The New Guild Theatre', Boston Transcript, April 29, 1925.

2. Ibid, and see above, Chapter III,

3. Ibid.

prominent contributors to the building fund. The designers may have borrowed Ames' idea of hanging the tapestries which decorated the walls. The single, deep rear balcony overhung only a small area of the orchestra: the greater part extended back over the main stair hall. The floor was carpeted in rich reds and browns, the seats upholstered in matching browns and golds. Two arms to each seat were considered 'an old fashioned luxury'.<sup>1</sup> The proportions of the auditorium, the simple decor and the plain proscenium arch produced the desired effect of an 'unusually close and intimate connection between the audience and the actors'.<sup>2</sup>

The stage was 'modern ... beyond any other stage in America .... Probably the most perfectly designed and equipped in this country'.<sup>3</sup> It measured seventy-seven feet in width, forty-nine feet in depth and ninety feet below the grid. The floor was without a revolve but completely trapped. A large cyclorama, sixty-five feet high, could be flown if necessary. For flying generally, there was a modern counterweight system. The electrical system was similarly advanced with a one hundred and fifty dimmer circuit switchboard, retractable footlights and twelve auditorium spotlights. The total cost to the Guild approached \$1,000,000.<sup>4</sup>

The Civic Repertory Theatre was the same size as the Guild

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1. Ibid.

2. 'The Guild Theatre, New York', Architectural Forum (July, 1925), pp.12ff.

3. Ibid.

4. W.P. Eaton, The Theatre Guild: The First Ten Years (New York, 1929), p.77.

with a seating capacity of one thousand one hundred but still well below the average size of the commercial theatre in this respect. Until she leased the 14th. Street which then became known as the Civic Repertory, Eva Le Gallienne and her company worked in a number of commercial theatres, leasing them only for the duration of a particular play or plays. Doing this, the company met opposition from commercial managers and leaseholders who objected to popular prices, and such temporary leases made it very difficult for the company to undertake a repertory schedule or to perfect its ensemble technique. The 14th. Street Theatre, at 105, West 14th. Street, was an undisputed choice for a more permanent home. It was leased for twelve years from 1926 at a monthly rental of \$1,665. At that time it was decaying in a declining neighborhood:

It stood crumbling and shabby, flanked on one side by the hideous travesty of a medieval fortress known as the 14th. Street Armory, and on the other by disreputable-looking buildings housing an anomalous collection of small factories and stores whose filthy windows rattled mournfully at the passage of the Sixth Avenue elevated trains.<sup>1</sup>

The Theatre itself looked 'moth-eaten', with its peeling paint and broken windows.<sup>2</sup> But before opening it received enough attention inside and out to restore some of the glory which had faded during the sixty years since it had first opened as the Théâtre Française. On each of the heavy pillars there appeared neatly framed playbills.<sup>3</sup>

1. E. Le Gallienne, With a Quiet Heart (New York, 1953), p.16.

2. Ibid.

3. See above, Chapter III.



Inside it was the kind of place the company needed: 'a real theatre, full of traditions, intimate, yet with a fairly large capacity'.<sup>1</sup> It was cleaned and some of the ornate blue and gold paintwork was freshened up. Over the years the company installed a new ventilation system, bought cushions for the rush seats in the second balcony, reupholstered the orchestra seats and laid new carpets. But there were always signs of old age in the fabric of the theatre. Reportedly it had a 'musty smell', the floor 'sagged and buckled', the radiators 'clanged during the performance', and at the rise of the curtain 'a brisk draft swept over the audience'.<sup>2</sup>

The company found the large stage and backstage space particularly suitable for repertory. The proscenium opened to thirty feet in width and height; the stage was seventy feet wide, thirty-three feet deep and sixty-six feet below the grid.<sup>3</sup>

There was room on the premises to build and paint scenery if necessary, room for wardrobes and sewing rooms and offices - in short there was room to breathe, room to work.<sup>4</sup>

In 1927 the company leased the building adjacent to the theatre

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1. E. Le Gallienne, New York Herald Tribune, April 28, 1935. Clipping, NYPL.TC.
  2. P. Cooper, 'Eva Le Gallienne's Civic Repertory Theatre', Diss. University of Illinois 1967, pp.72-73.
  3. MS. NYPL.TC. Elsewhere it was claimed with some exaggeration to be the largest stage in New York with the exception of the Hippodrome and the Metropolitan Opera House. Civic Repertory Theatre Bulletin (November, 1930). The stages of both the Guild Theatre and the New Theatre were bigger.
  4. E. Le Gallienne, New York Herald Tribune, April 28, 1935. Clipping, NYPL.TC.

(not the 14th. Street Armory) and converted it for use as green-room, dressing rooms, workshops, storage, library, offices and, on the top floor, a flat for Le Gallienne herself.

Again, limited capacity and financial problems were the main reasons why the company left the Civic in 1932. The company hoped to make enough money uptown at the New Amsterdam Theatre to return there but met with no success. In 1933-34 there was still the possibility of a return while the company toured and performed at the Shubert and Broadhurst Theatres in New York City but the Civic was to remain in other hands.

Although the Jewish Art Theatre was slightly larger than the Civic having one thousand two hundred seats, this company made as much of the intimate character of the building.<sup>1</sup> The theatre had opened some thirty years before as the Garden Theatre, part of the Madison Square Garden complex which also included an amphitheatre, restaurant, concert hall and roof garden, at 61, Madison Avenue. It was almost as remote from the commercial theatre district as the other Lower East Side theatre, the Neighborhood Playhouse.<sup>2</sup> From Madison Square, the architectural style of the theatre appeared

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1. There were one thousand two hundred seats in 1890. By 1919, the number may have been reduced: see 'Garden Theatre', TS. NYPL.TC., which states that there were nine hundred and ten seats.
  2. See L.V. De Foe, New York World, November 18, 1920. Clipping, NYPL.TC.

as 'an exquisite specimen of Terra Cotta art'.<sup>1</sup> Beyond the spacious lobbies, the white auditorium ceiling with its large central dome was finished in plaster squares. Plaster scroll work in the corners was carried onto the proscenium arch and onto the ceilings beneath the two balconies. The walls were hung with striped silk. The seats were in red plush. It was a 'Louis XVI' style, complemented by an elaborate copy of Boldini's The Park of Versailles which decorated the outer drop curtain. If the decor was not likely to bring about a dramatically intimate atmosphere, the designers claimed to have succeeded in their 'unique treatment of lines and architecture which is calculated to produce in the audience a feeling of being near to the stage'.<sup>2</sup> The stage was low set behind a proscenium opening thirty feet in width, thirty feet in height. It measured sixty feet wide, twenty-nine and a half feet deep and fifty-eight feet below the gridiron.<sup>3</sup> Described as well-equipped when it first opened, like the Civic it was not pioneering any technical discoveries in the 1920s.

The largest of the Art Theatres was the one thousand six hundred seat New Theatre at 62nd. and 63rd. Streets, Central Park West, built at a cost of nearly \$3,000,000.<sup>4</sup> North of the

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1. Programme, 1890. NYPL.TC.; and see above, Chapter III.

2. Ibid.

3. 'Garden Theatre', TS. NYPL.TC.

4. Including land and the rental and equipment of a workshop at 42, West 62nd. Street.



commercial theatre district its location, like that of the Guild Theatre, was selected with an eye to the uptown trend of theatre building. Its façade was 'Italian Renaissance' in style, reminding the critic Albert Bergh of the Sansovino Library in Venice.<sup>1</sup> Inside, the public facilities were plentiful and spacious. Anticipating the Guild,

the New Theatre has not been designed according to the usual American interpretation of the word, that is, a mere showhouse where, in order to make the venture a financial success, the entire building is given over to the Auditorium and the Stage.<sup>2</sup>

There were three separate lobbies at street level in which there were small shops. On other floors there were separate lounges for the ladies and gentlemen, a ballroom area and a tea room. The space was sufficiently large for facilities to be duplicated so that subscribers and those with tickets for orchestra seats need not mix with those occupying the upper balconies. All could use the Grand Staircases but these were double and led to separate lobbies, a feature which a number of democratically minded critics found very disagreeable.<sup>3</sup> The rich decor of Sienna and Connemara marble, cerise carpets and grey- and gold-toned walls was carried through into the auditorium which some critics found 'oppressive in its lavish ostentation, .... an exotic plant and not a beautiful one at that'.<sup>4</sup> But others were enthusiastic: for them it was the most magnificent theatre in America, comparable on

1. 'The New Theatre', Columbian Magazine (December, 1909); and see above, Chapter III.

2. Carrere and Hastings, 'The New Theatre', TS, February 20, 1908. H.TC.

3. See W. Mailly, 'The New Theatre on Trial', Twentieth Century Magazine (June, 1910).

4. 'E.C.W.', Mirror. Clipping, NYPL.TC.

the score of pervading richness and detailed beauty with the finest playhouses of Continental Europe.<sup>1</sup>

The founders chose a theatre which would be rich and decorative, without being too elaborate, and one which would have a large seating capacity, without losing an intimate atmosphere. The question of intimacy here became controversial once the plan was made public. At the beginning there were to be seats for as many as two thousand three hundred and eighteen: six hundred in the orchestra, three hundred in forty-eight boxes (arranged in two tiers of twenty-four) and the rest in two balconies.<sup>2</sup> Still there would be the intimacy the founders desired because of the shape of the auditorium which would be oval, the long axis parallel to the front of the stage. By these means, 'everyone in the Auditorium shall be near enough to hear and to see the performance in all of its artistic perfection and subtleties'.<sup>3</sup> But when they offered Harley Granville-Barker the directorship in 1908, he felt that such intimacy would be impossible in a building of such dimensions. He expressed his opinions in the New York press:

I think that the very size of the structure now planned and under way would foil the purpose of the undertaking. The building is far too big.<sup>4</sup>

And this criticism was picked up by others. A number of interested parties publicly defended the design but the private criticism of Winthrop Ames, later appointed director, persuaded the founders to

1. Boston Evening Transcript, November 6, 1909. Clipping, H.TC.

2. Carrere and Hastings, 'The New Theatre', TS, February 20, 1908. H.TC.

3. Ibid.

4. Quoted in New York Sun, November 14, 1909. Clipping, H.TC.

make some changes.<sup>1</sup> They reduced the overall size as much as reasonably practical on foundations already laid.

Changes did not end when the theatre opened in 1909. The acoustics proved unsatisfactory and critics continued to censor the size of the theatre vis-à-vis its artistic intentions. To meet both problems, the founders altered the internal structure in the summer of 1910. They cut the number of boxes further from twenty-three to sixteen and shut off the second balcony completely. They screened parts of the first balcony and hung an acoustic canopy from the ceiling.<sup>2</sup>

From the planning stage, there were few doubts about the suitability of the technical facilities behind the curtain which went far beyond the usual equipment found in the commercial theatre. The stage was very big, measuring one hundred feet wide, sixty-eight feet deep and one hundred and twelve feet below the grid, behind a proscenium arch forty-five feet wide and forty feet high. To the front a mechanically adjustable orchestra pit could become an apron stage to capture the intimate 'Elizabethan manner'.<sup>3</sup> To the rear there were two cycloramas and in the stage itself was the first revolve in New York City. The counterweight flying system had no

1. H. Bell, New York Times, April 6, 1908; J. Corbin, New York Times, April 9, 1908; T. Hastings, New York Times, April 18, 1908; and W. Ames, 'Prospectus', Leaflet, July 13, 1908. NYPL.TC.
2. See J.H. Jennings, 'A History of the New Theatre in New York', Diss. Stanford University 1953, pp.176ff.
3. O. Brainerd, 'Engineering Features of the New Theatre', New York Architect (November, 1909).



precedent in New York and the lighting system was 'entirely novel and of a much more complete scale than has ever before been attempted'.<sup>1</sup>

Whether the founders succeeded in creating an intimate theatre is open to doubt. But it is certain that this was their intention, or came to be their intention after some debate and experience. As well as making the best of the main auditorium, they welcomed Ames' suggestion that the planned roof-garden be converted instead to a little theatre, or 'Théâtre Intime', 'with a fully equipped stage and a small, compact auditorium (seating say five or six hundred)'.<sup>2</sup> In fact they leased off the New Theatre before the rooftop stage was completed. And when the New Theatre proved too expensive to run and hostile criticism did not abate, the founders like the New Playwrights proposed a fresh start, where intimacy and economy could better be served. In 1911 they announced that they would 'immediately proceed to erect, upon a site conveniently accessible to all classes of theatregoers, a theatre of moderate size'.<sup>3</sup> This theatre 'of moderate size' became the Little Theatre under the personal ownership of Winthrop Ames.

The Art Theatre groups performed in a large number of widely

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1. Winthrop Ames, in J.H. Jennings, 'Ames's Notes for the Perfect Theatre', Educational Theatre Journal (March, 1960), p.12.
  2. W. Ames, 'Prospectus', Leaflet, July 13, 1908. NYPL.TC.
  3. In J.H. Jennings, 'A History of the New Theatre in New York', Diss. Stanford University 1953, pp.232ff.

scattered theatres,<sup>1</sup> theatres which were characteristically small and intimate whether built as theatres or converted to the purpose. Some, particularly suitable, were naturally attractive to more than one group of similar ideals: thus the Neighborhood Playhouse group, for example, planned to move to the Little Theatre, the Washington Square Players, the Provincetown and the Laboratory were all associated with 139, Macdougall Street, the Guild and the Provincetown both performed at the Garrick, and the Provincetown, at 133, Macdougall Street, provided a venue for the New Playwrights. But the groups rarely stayed long in one place. As I have shown, economic circumstances and the quest for higher artistic standards were some of the pressures forever acting on the groups, often compelling them to change their premises and find new ones where they could. The changes usually meant improvement of facilities and expansion, just as they did in organizational terms,<sup>2</sup> but never the forfeiture of the ideal of intimacy. And, though the Art Theatre houses remained intimate, their alterations and equipment often placed them technically far ahead of their commercial counterparts. ✓

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1. Even excluding all the makeshift premises and commercial theatres where they gave occasional productions.
  2. See above, e.g. Chapter V, p.197.

## CHAPTER VIII

### REPERTORY

The answer? Repertoire. Genuine repertoire. We all know it - it's as simple as truth.

Eugene O'Neill, 'Genuine Repertory',  
New York Times, November 8, 1925.



If 'Art Theatre' as a general term meant anything to the average theatregoer in New York early this century, it would almost certainly have signified - among other things - the operation of some kind of 'repertory' system. Indeed, though they differed in their interpretations of it, all the groups I am considering held the repertory ideal in common. As the critic Rebecca Drucker observed, it helped form 'the mechanical basis of the art theatre',<sup>1</sup> to say nothing of helping to differentiate the Art Theatre from its commercial counterpart.

Stock and repertory systems had almost ceased to exist in America by about 1900.<sup>2</sup> Eva Le Gallienne characterized stock as the presentation by a permanent company of 'a new play every week, or if it is a very grand company, every two weeks ... At the end of the week, or two weeks, the play is discarded and another one started. The company puts on a series of plays the whole year round'.<sup>3</sup> Repertory was a slightly more complex version. As defined by Kenneth Macgowan, 'the repertory theatre is a theatre that presents two or more plays in varying sequence within any given week, week after week'.<sup>4</sup> And in 'pure' repertory, almost daily

1. 'The Jewish Art Theatre', Theatre Arts Magazine (July, 1920), p.220.
2. See Chapter II, pp.13ff.; also B. Hewitt, Theatre U.S.A.: 1668-1957 (New York, 1959), p.278; A.H. Quinn, A History of the American Drama from the Civil War to the Present Day (New York, 1945), I, 3; and A. Davenport, 'The Repertoire System' in Stage Affairs in America Today (Boston, 1907).
3. 'The Difference Between Stock and Repertory', New York Herald Tribune, September 8, 1929.
4. Footlights Across America (New York, 1929), p.61.

rotation of a large and varied number of plays was possible.

While the commercial, 'unlimited run' system had replaced stock and repertory in the interests of higher production standards, economy and maximum profit potential, a small number of artists held that repertory or stock were still far preferable and agreed with an English critic's contention that 'the backbone of any artistic advance must be a resident, repertory stock company'.<sup>1</sup> They might acknowledge that the commercial system had raised production standards generally because it allowed investment of more time and money in a single production but they felt that it could never satisfy the need for more experimental dramas, regular revivals of classic plays and frequent changes of roles for actors. The producer Heinrich Conreid put this idea to a meeting of the American Dramatists' Club over dinner at Delmonico's in 1903. Conreid himself had founded a stock company at the Irving Place Theatre in 1892 (in opposition to the trend), alternating classics with modern plays and occasionally reviving successes, 'illustrating in New York the possibilities of the repertory stock company ... which was unknown to the rising generation of playgoers'.<sup>2</sup>

There were a few other examples to show that stock had not entirely disappeared. In 1900 the People's Repertory Theatre developed a short-lived rotation of classics, (the term 'repertory' was used very loosely before the Art Theatre era). From abroad,

1. W. Archer, 'American Drama's Development Needs Well-Conducted Repertory Theatre', New York Evening Post, February 22, 1921.

2. J. Corbin, 'The New Theatre', Outlook (October 23, 1909), p.395.

touring stars like Eleanora Duse (1902), Edward Terry (1904), Ellen Terry (1907) and Vera Komisarzhovsky (1908) often presented their repertoires in series, sometimes in alternation. American touring companies did the same, headed by, for example, Ada Rehan (1904) and E.H. Sothorn (1908). And the producer Daniel Frohman worked with a stock system at the New Lyceum after 1903. But these were rare instances among the prevalent commercial play schedules.

Into this environment, beginning with the New Theatre in 1909, the Art Theatres brought a renewed and strengthened emphasis on the ideal of repertory and stock. As a result of their activities and supported by a growing critical advocacy<sup>1</sup> stock companies began to revive throughout the States. After the Art Theatre era, genuine repertory found a home in a number of Shakespeare festivals, notably the Oregon Shakespeare Festival (1936), the National Shakespeare Festival (1949), the American Shakespeare Festival Theatre (founded by Lawrence Langner, 1951), the Colorado Shakespeare Festival (1958) and the Southeastern Shakespeare Festival of Atlanta (1961). In 1951 the Living Theatre established repertory at the Cherry Lane Theatre, old home of the New Playwrights; the repertory Actors' Workshop opened in 1952; and in 1960 Eva Le Gallienne's continuing crusade for reform after the 'failure' of

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1. E.g. 'The principal achievement of the Repertoire theatre is the development of the American playwright .... No move which could be made would be more significant for the art life of Philadelphia'. A.H. Quinn, 'Now My Idea Is This', Philadelphia Evening Public Ledger, March 30, 1922.



the Civic Repertory Theatre, was rewarded by her appointment as Honorary President of the National Repertory Theatre. In no sense did repertory or stock supplant the commercial schedule, but it truly revived between 1909 and 1932.

The ideals of the Art Theatres were not in perfect accord, but a general commitment to some form of variable schedule is evident, whether to 'pure' repertory at one extreme or to a stock system at the other. Both the Civic Repertory Theatre and the New Theatre, for instance, placed particular emphasis on the repertory ideal. Eva Le Gallienne, at the Civic Repertory wanted, 'each season to produce a number of plays which she believes have permanent value, and once they are produced, keep them in her repertoire'.<sup>1</sup> The founders of the New Theatre asserted that 'There will of course be from the start frequent changes of repertoire, and after a few seasons the management expects to be in a position to produce a different play, or opéra comique, each evening'.<sup>1</sup> In these two organizations the commitment to repertory was strongest, but every Art Theatre shared the same ideal to some extent. The Theatre Guild announced a stock schedule: 'A comedy and a classical revival or bill of one act plays will be presented for a period of four weeks each during the preliminary season'.<sup>1</sup> The New Playwrights' Theatre announced four 'spring productions' and that a further 'eight more

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1. See Chapter III.

plays will be introduced into the repertory during the season of 1927-28'.<sup>1</sup> The Washington Square Players refer loosely to their 'repertory';<sup>1</sup> the American Laboratory Theatre looked to a future when it 'might develop into a successful repertory theatre';<sup>1</sup> and the Neighborhood Playhouse announced weekend productions, interspersed with 'visiting companies of well-known artists'.<sup>1</sup> Although the Little Theatre was to use the commercial system in practice, Winthrop Ames was 'anxious to produce as many plays as I can every season, and I plan to make the special matinee performances of unusual plays a regular part of the scheme'.<sup>1</sup> Neither the Jewish Art Theatre nor the Provincetown referred to the organization of production schedule in their manifestos but, as I shall try to show, both rejected the commercial system in practice.

Not only was the ideal of repertory felt to be worthwhile in itself: it also correlated closely with the corpus of ideals the Art Theatres held. While repertory allowed far greater flexibility in artistic policy (and therefore for more experimentation) and provided a balance of work for a permanent, co-operative organization, it was also a sine qua non in pursuit of the federated audience. The non-commercial ideal which led the Art Theatres to found subscription systems also involved a need to develop a production schedule capable of fulfilling the pledge to subscribers of a number of different plays each season. And small, informal, 'special' audiences, with loyal but short-lived demand, created a need for

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1. See Chapter III.

a production schedule also capable of supplying new plays for short runs. In this there was a certain irony, for the Art Theatres only gained the 'security' of the subscription system or special audience by establishing an expensive production schedule. There is no doubt that repertory cost more to maintain than the commercial run. Some economies are certainly possible: actors may accept smaller wages for permanent employment; production costs may diminish in the long term as revivals increasingly take the place of new productions and sets and properties may be interchangeable. But, on the other hand, large storage space, a large and permanent theatre, a large, permanent acting company and administrative staff, a large initial capital expenditure to establish the repertory - all these things make for increased costs. (And, of course, repertory is proportionately more expensive than stock: yet more complex to administer, needing more labour in exchanging sets, more supernumeraries to make up the casts, more capital expense and larger facilities.)

This factor of cost seems to have played the most important part in the development of the Art Theatres' schedules. There is a well-defined pattern of theatres espousing repertory, then finding great economic difficulty in applying or sustaining it. A further factor re-enforced the same pattern; most theatres discovered that repertory was difficult to arrange in organizational terms and that it was physically exhausting to run.

Despite expense and beyond necessity, the Art Theatres pursued



the repertory schedules for their own sake. The Civic Repertory Theatre was one of the few organizations not obliged to produce rapidly by an organized or special audience. Yet here pure repertory was established and tenaciously maintained in a way which surpassed the hopes of every other Art Theatre. The ideal of repertory was central to the very existence of the theatre. Eva Le Gallienne recalled an experience from which the Civic Repertory grew as early as 1923:

For the first time, the thought tangibly crossed my mind: where are the repertory theatres in this country? The answer came to me in a flash of surprised revelation: 'There are none'. The question 'Why?' followed inevitably and from then on the problem of supplying this lack in the scope of the American theatre became my incessant and persistent obsession.<sup>1</sup>

For Le Gallienne, repertory was the essential binding force of the organization which would enable it to preserve classic plays and give new scope to the actor. Contemporary producers dared not risk many classic plays in the commercial run, whereas in repertory the successful plays offset the less popular but equally worthwhile: 'in their union there is strength'.<sup>2</sup> In her view the commercial system condemned the actor either to lengthy periods of unemployment or to monotonous repetition of a part. She had experienced both conditions herself in the years immediately following her arrival in New York: her continuous playing of Julie in Molnar's Lilium for the Theatre Guild in 1921 she had found particularly hard to bear.

1. At 33 (New York, 1934), p.168.

2. 'The Open Door to the Child's Imagination', TS [1928]. NYPL.TC.

In 1926 the Civic Repertory opened with a repertory of four plays to which others were regularly added. Here is an example of an early schedule from 1927:

Monday, February 21, 1927, evening:	<u>The Master Builder.</u>
Tuesday, February 22, 1927, matinée:	<u>The Master Builder.</u>
Tuesday, February 22, 1927, evening:	<u>Cradle Song.</u>
Wednesday, February 23, 1927, matinée:	<u>Cradle Song.</u>
Wednesday, February 23, 1927, evening:	<u>La Locandiera.</u>
Thursday, February 24, 1927, evening:	<u>The Three Sisters.</u>
Friday, February 25, 1927, evening:	<u>Cradle Song.</u>
Saturday, February 26, 1927, matinée:	<u>Cradle Song.</u>
Saturday, February 26, 1927, evening:	<u>John Gabriel Borkman. 1</u>

And a similarly random example of a week's schedule from late in 1932 illustrates the extent to which the repertory principle persisted:

Monday, November 7, 1932, evening:	<u>Camille.</u>
Tuesday, November 8, 1932, evening:	<u>Liliom.</u>
Wednesday, November 9, 1932, matinée:	<u>Liliom.</u>
Wednesday, November 9, 1932, evening:	<u>Cradle Song.</u>
Thursday, November 10, 1932, evening:	<u>Liliom.</u>
Friday, November 11, 1932, evening:	<u>Camille.</u>
Saturday, November 12, 1932, matinée:	<u>Peter Pan.</u>
Saturday, November 12, 1932, evening:	<u>The Three Sisters. 2</u>

This is 'pure' repertory: no play was presented more than four times each week, no play was given more than two consecutive performances, five and even six different plays were shown and the most popular plays were usually shown on the quieter days at the beginning of the week. Revivals from previous seasons figured prominently: from the second example, The Three Sisters first

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1. 'The Civic Repertory Theatre Inc.', Leaflet, February 14, 1927. H.TC.
  2. 'The Civic Repertory Theatre', Leaflet, October 31, 1932. NYPL.TC.

appeared in 1926, Cradle Song (by Gregorio and Maria Sierra) in 1927.

But in 1933 there was a change. The company left the 14th. Street Theatre to take just two plays to the uptown New Amsterdam. Here they simply alternated, playing half a week each. The reasons for the change were principally economic, stemming from an excessive investment in Le Gallienne's Alice in Wonderland and the failure of private backing for the theatre. Le Gallienne hoped the modification of repertory would be temporary:

She is abandoning repertory to save repertory; she is going uptown to get the money to save her theatre downtown and to make it possible to reopen it next season with the policy unchanged.<sup>1</sup>

But after an unsuccessful run of only five weeks repertory was only preserved, and that in modified form, by quitting New York for an extended tour. When the company returned to the city for a brief season in December 1933, they presented only three plays. Back on tour, they dropped all but a small residue of the original repertoire and finally abandoned hope of returning to 14th. Street.

Smaller modifications to the production schedule before the more radical changes of 1933 had already indicated that all was not well with the theatre. Touring out of season began, locally at first to Philadelphia and Boston, ultimately further afield. Duplicate companies also toured. Members of the repertory company performed scenes from the repertoire in Vaudeville houses and they

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1. Programme for Alice in Wonderland, February 6, 1933. NYPL.TC.



tried a longer New York season from September 16th. in 1929-30. In 1930-31 the management introduced another modification, which was common to many of the Art Theatres: they took a play (Alison's House, by Susan Glaspell) out of the repertory to enable it to pursue a potentially more lucrative, independent life in an unrestricted uptown run.

While economic pressures were chiefly responsible for these changes, there is evidence that the complexity of the system and the inability of the personnel to withstand the demanding pressures of repertory also contributed to the tendency to simplify the schedule. In a newspaper article headed 'An Actor Looks at Repertory', Jacob Ben-Ami, who had been working with the Civic Repertory, described some of the unsatisfactory effects of production pressure.<sup>1</sup> Eva Le Gallienne herself fell ill on several occasions, perhaps through nervousness and overwork, forcing her at one time to interrupt the schedule for a whole season (1931-32). Then again, the production schedule tended to confuse the public. One drama editor found it 'more complicated than anything in his experience except the brief of a hearing before the Interstate Commerce Commission on differential freight rates from common points to shipside'.<sup>2</sup>

The degree to which pure repertory was established and maintained at the Civic Repertory Theatre gives the organization an outstanding

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1. Clipping, NYPL.TC.

2. New York Telegram, August 29, 1926.

place among the Art Theatres, as well as in the history of the American theatre as a whole. But the work of the New Theatre was scarcely less significant, if only because this antedated the Civic Repertory by some seventeen years. In 1926 the climate of opinion among progressive thinkers in the theatre was becoming favourable to the repertory ideal in a manner much more general and enthusiastic than had existed even a few years previously. In 1909 there was no comparable climate of opinion. The founders of the New Theatre simply regarded the repertory as one of the best 'traditions' of the stage.<sup>1</sup> In looking both to Europe and to the Metropolitan Opera House for a design, they discovered in repertory a desirable eclectic quality and a means of meeting the demands of a subscription audience. In so doing they demonstrated and helped keep alive an alternative to the commercial schedule which subsequent Art Theatres were to take up.

As early as April 1908, Heinrich Conreid, who had moved from the Irving Place Theatre to the Metropolitan Opera House and had begun to formulate plans for a theatre on the scale of the Opera House, publicly aired his view that this theatre might introduce up to ten new productions each year for five years to establish a 'bank' of fifty plays for continuous revival.<sup>2</sup> By July decisions had been taken:

This theatre shall be conducted as a Repertory Theatre, and it shall be a general rule (although in cases of

1. See Chapter III, p. 53.

2. New York Times, April 21, 1908.

necessity this rule may be temporarily suspended) that not less than three different plays shall be performed during each week, and that no play shall be given more than four times in succession.<sup>1</sup>

The early play schedules realized these plans almost exactly. Like the Civic Repertory, the New Theatre presented at least four different plays each week, with the same play rarely in consecutive programmes. In the first season (1909-10), the theatre introduced twelve plays to its permanent company. Here is the schedule of a random week:

Monday, December 6, 1909, evening:	<u>The Nigger.</u>
Tuesday, December 7, 1909, matinée:	<u>Antony and Cleopatra.</u>
Tuesday, December 7, 1909, evening:	<u>The Cottage in the Air.</u>
Wednesday, December 8, 1909, matinée:	<u>The Cottage in the Air.</u>
Wednesday, December 8, 1909, evening:	<u>Strife.</u>
Thursday, December 9, 1909, matinée:	(Opera).
Thursday, December 9, 1909, evening:	<u>The Nigger.</u>
Friday, December 10, 1909, evening:	(Opera).
Saturday, December 11, 1909, matinée:	<u>The Nigger.</u>
Saturday, December 11, 1909, evening:	<u>Strife.</u> <sup>2</sup>

As the schedule moved into its second season there was a notable change. The management modified the auditorium in 1910 by reducing seating capacity and improving acoustics to give its artistic policy a better chance. A smaller house made performance of opera more difficult, so first these productions disappeared from the schedule.<sup>3</sup> While there continued to be weeks of pure repertory, there were generally fewer different productions in the week, performances more often ran consecutively, and sometimes there were weeks in which there was scarcely any alternation at all.

1. W. Ames, 'Prospectus', Leaflet, July 13, 1908, pp.18-19. NYPL.TC.
2. See programme for The Nigger, December 6, 1909. H.TC.
3. 'The New Theatre to be Remodelled', New York Times, February 20, 1910.



In the six days between November 7 and November 12, 1910, for example, there were nine performances, of which eight in succession were of The Merry Wives of Windsor.<sup>1</sup> The deficit of considerable proportions at the end of 1910,<sup>2</sup> was responsible for such economies. As at the Civic Repertory, the schedule was further disturbed by the removal of a play for an uninterrupted run when Maurice Maeterlinck's The Bluebird transferred to the Majestic. Although the management had hoped to add a further eight or ten productions to the repertory in 1910-11, in fact it introduced only seven. There is evidence too of an inability to cope with the sheer physical demands such a schedule imposed. In December 1910, Winthrop Ames and Lee Shubert wrote jointly to the founders admitting that the system made it 'necessary to make a larger number of productions each season than is consistent with ... proper preparation'.<sup>3</sup> Economy and simplification led to a further retreat from the established schedule, a step which a few Art Theatres also undertook, that is the importation of guest companies. This would mean a substantial saving on capital expenses by exchanging production investment for a simple percentage of box-office income which served to 'hire' the touring company. This allowed an extra subscription bill to be produced

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1. See programme for The Merry Wives of Windsor, November 7, 1910. H.TC.
  2. J.H. Jennings, 'A History of the New Theatre in New York', Diss. Stanford University 1953, p.211.
  3. Ibid, pp.211-12.

with the minimum effort and risk. In the case of the New Theatre there were two such productions at the end of 1909-10; and two in 1910-11.

With the Civic Repertory Theatre, the Neighborhood Playhouse was another Art Theatre to take up the alternating system as an important ideal, given impetus as it was by the New Theatre. Coincidentally the Playhouse did not attain its most developed form of alternation until 1926, the year in which the Civic Repertory began to operate. At the beginning, in 1915, plays were given runs of fixed, short duration. But as early as 1919 there was 'a plan for a small repertory company',<sup>1</sup> this before the organization introduced an audience subscription system (in 1921) which for the first time compelled regular production of a minimum number of plays each season. At a time when extended runs of a play became possible, as the Playhouse's reputation blossomed in 1922, the management occasionally began to alternate plays within the week. In March 1926, it began to alternate plays continuously, with revivals as well as new plays. A desire to develop a repertory schedule therefore seems to have been present at an early date and so was not to make a virtue of necessity. Although first a limited audience and then a subscription audience made it unfeasible to present plays for a free run, it was not necessary for the Playhouse

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1. 'Meeting of Neighborhood Players, Festival Dancers, Balalaika Orchestra, Choral Groups', TS, November 28, 1919. NYPL.TC.

to take the additional, idealistic step of alternating its plays. In June 1926 a Neighborhood Playbill endorsed a newspaper article by Montrose J. Moses:

I rummage in the scrapheap of the uselessly extravagant commercial theatre, and there I see broken and bleeding many a play never given its chance .... There is only one channel of full development: Repertory - the theatre of giving a chance rather than of taking a chance.<sup>1</sup>

In 1927, a comprehensive pamphlet entitled 'The Repertory Idea' was published by the Playhouse itself. 'Repertory is valuable', it asserted, because

it permits what is worthwhile in experimentation to become a permanent possession and not merely a shadowy and forgotten step in a long process of experience. A production worthy of survival is worthy of revival; and a theatre which strives to represent the theatre must strike a balance between its past and future.<sup>2</sup>

Between 1915 and 1926, the development of the Neighborhood Playhouse schedule was slow and careful, consistent with its treatment of other ideals. In 1915, a series of plays appeared on the Saturday and Sunday evening of each week, generally for five consecutive weeks. The system persisted until 1920, with occasional modifications for visiting companies which might perform for a full week.<sup>3</sup> Rising artistic standards seem to have figured prominently in the general change to a full week's schedule by 1920-21. In this season, the management attempted to rotate two productions within a week, on a temporary basis by

1. Programme for The Grand Street Follies, June 22, 1926. H.TC.

2. H.TC.

3. Programme for Great Catherine November 17, 1916. NYPL.TC.



adding Salut au Monde (adapted from Walt Whitman's poem by Alice and Irene Lewisohn) to the run of The Green Ring (by Zinaida Hippus) for a total of sixteen performances on Saturday and Sunday evenings.<sup>1</sup> In 1926 the alternation system of half-weeks, which gave a play four consecutive performances on either Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday (with a Wednesday matinée) or Friday, Saturday and Sunday (with a Saturday matinée), was established on a long term basis.<sup>2</sup> Then on March 23, the Playbill announced 'The Neighborhood Playhouse becomes a repertory theatre' and soon there followed revivals, like The Little Clay Cart.<sup>3</sup>

Just one year later, the Neighborhood Playhouse announced that it would close. Its repertory was thus more short-lived and its retreat from the system more rapid in effect than at either the Civic Repertory or the New Theatre. The principal cause of break down, again, was financial difficulty. Various measures had been taken to relieve economic pressure while yet preserving the element of alternation. The Playhouse had transferred plays for unlimited runs uptown, including two Granville-Barker plays in 1921, The Harlequinade and The Madras House. It also produced a revue - the popular Grand Street Follies - at the conclusion of its regular season from 1922, which ran freely into the summer. There is evidence to suggest that the management believed that the introduction of revivals and permanent alternation would be cheaper than

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1. Programme for Salut au Monde, April 22, 1922. NYPL.TC.

2. Programme for The Dybbuk, March 20, 1926. NYPL.TC.

3. Programme for The Lion Tamer, October 7, 1926. NYPL.TC.

the series of limited runs.<sup>1</sup> But in reality of course the financial situation was made worse rather than better, lack of facilities, particularly, making the storage and interchange of plays an uneconomic proposition. (After several performances of Francis Faragoh's Pinwheel /1927/, the stage manager John Roche was forced to suggest that the scenery be broken up, since there was nowhere to store it.)<sup>2</sup> It is possible, too, that the organization found the schedule of revivals too demanding, interfering with developments towards new artistic achievements: Alice Lewisohn certainly characterized it in retrospect as basically opposed to the spirit of the Playhouse which she regarded as essentially experimental.<sup>3</sup>

At the time of its achievement in alternating plays, tentative though it was, and slowly evolved in comparison either to the Civic Repertory or to the New Theatre, the Neighborhood Playhouse was justifiably proud. But its claim to be 'the first American theatre of the present day to maintain a permanent professional company in a repertoire of dramatic and lyric productions'<sup>4</sup> was perhaps a little stronger than the circumstances warranted. There were other Art Theatres active in the same period: the Jewish Art Theatre, for example, in 1919-1921, which, along with the Provincetown,

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1. A. (Lewisohn) Crowley, The Neighborhood Playhouse: Leaves from a Theatre Scrapbook (New York, 1959), pp.219ff.
  2. TS, March 19, 1927. NYPL.TC.
  3. The Neighborhood Playhouse: Leaves from a Theatre Scrapbook (New York, 1959), p.227.
  4. Programme for The Dybbuk, May 21, 1926. NYPL.TC.

bridged the years between the alternating systems of the New Theatre of 1909 and the Neighborhood Playhouse and Civic Repertory of 1926.

The system employed at the Jewish Art Theatre was remarkably similar to the one the Playhouse developed. The critic Walter A. Lowenberg described the schedule in 1920:

Plays are continued for a run, but not until they exhaust their popularity and are bled white as is the fate of the Broadway play. Each new play presented is added to the repertoire of the company and performances are alternated throughout the week.<sup>1</sup>

As at the Playhouse, two plays were alternated within the week and included revivals; but here, unlike the Civic Repertory, the most popular plays appeared on the best attended weekend evenings. The Jewish Art Theatre introduced the system at its opening in 1919 and probably maintained it throughout both operating seasons, although there seems to be insufficient evidence to confirm the supposition. In support of the idealism there was a long-standing tradition of short runs, or alternations, to serve the needs of the limited, East Side, Yiddish-speaking audience. Because of language and social barriers, the tradition was not generally recognized by contemporary critics of the New York stage. One critic however, Rebecca Drucker, did make the important observation: 'There are points in which the Jewish theatre starts in advance from our own. For one thing it has always existed by the repertory

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1. Theatre Magazine (April, 1920). Clipping, NYPL.TC.



system'.<sup>1</sup> But the Jewish Art Theatre possessed a more positive attitude to the alternating system than that of tradition. With the Art Theatres it was important for its own sake. Jacob Ben-Ami explained his commitment to the ideal to the critic Pierre Loving soon after he joined the Jewish Art Theatre. In his view it demanded from the actor the 'widest flexibility'.<sup>2</sup>

Both the American Laboratory Theatre and the Provincetown developed repertory systems over a period, like the Neighborhood Playhouse. Although the Laboratory expressed interest in the ideal of repertory as early as 1923,<sup>3</sup> its schedule emerged gradually over a period of two seasons. In 1924-25 only one play reached production. In October of 1925-26, the members of the group presented Twelfth Night on three weekday evenings: Tuesday, Thursday and Friday.<sup>4</sup> In November, they added The Sea Woman's Cloak (by Amélie Rivers) on Monday, Wednesday and Saturday.<sup>5</sup> Then in January 1926, they added a third play The Scarlet Letter (adapted by Miriam Stockton) so that the schedule appeared as follows: Twelfth Night, Wednesday and

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1. 'The Jewish Art Theatre', Theatre Arts Magazine (July, 1920), p.220.

2. P. Loving, 'Ben-Ami and the Tragic Mask', Drama (June, 1921), p.326.

3. See Chapter III, p.90.

4. See Programme for Twelfth Night, October 17, 1925. NYPL.TC.

5. November 6, 1925. Clipping, NYPL.TC.

Saturday evenings; The Sea Woman's Cloak, Friday evening and Saturday matinée; The Scarlet Letter, Tuesday and Thursday evenings.<sup>1</sup> They maintained this schedule for two seasons, adding new plays, with occasional interruptions for short runs.

If a regular supply of new plays was essential to meet the demands of the subscription audience (organized in 1925-26) the members of the Laboratory also affirmed the ideal of putting these plays into repertory: notes in a programme of 1927 recall that the group came together in its belief that 'a co-operative repertory company would succeed in New York'.<sup>2</sup> The ideal was slow to be realized because in 1923 the theatre had not the resources either of money, facilities or personnel to undertake elaborate alternations. Later, financial pressures, which the development of alternations had served to intensify, forced the Laboratory to abandon the season 1928-29. Occasional short visits to theatres outside New York and modifications along the normal lines of, for example, removing the successful Clemence Dane's Granite to the Mayfair for a free run in 1927, had failed to restore financial equilibrium. When the company was re-formed in 1929, economies and some changes in personnel rendered the restoration of the repertory schedule undesirable and four plays succeeded each other in short runs. The theatre closed at the end of 1929-30.

There was a similar pattern at the Provincetown. Perhaps the first public announcement that its members took an interest in the ideal of alternation coincided with the foundation and pronouncements of the American Laboratory Theatre in 1923. Under the

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1. New Yorker, July 17, 1926. Clipping, NYPL.TC.

2. Programme for The Straw Hat [1927]. NYPL.TC.

auspices of the Triumvirate, the Provincetown announced that it would be 'an experiment ... in organization, looking towards the development of a genuine repertory theatre'.<sup>1</sup> Although the theatre, like the New Theatre, the Neighborhood Playhouse and the American Laboratory Theatre, had forsaken the commercial audience for the subscription audience and the obligation of a minimum number of plays each season, it considered the further step towards alternating these plays of similar importance. Eugene O'Neill explained the essential merits of the system in terms of helping the playwright, by helping the actor to develop his art. The answer to many of the playwright's problems was 'Repertoire. Genuine Repertoire. We all know it - it's as simple as truth.'<sup>2</sup> Kenneth Macgowan characterized the development of a system of alternations at the Provincetown as an idealistic impulse, the result of an 'inner bias in favour of repertory',<sup>3</sup> which the atmosphere of the Art Theatres created.

But development towards a system of alternations was slow. Having presented a series of different plays in short runs in two summer seasons in Provincetown, some of which they revived from one season to the next or as review bills at the end of the season, the Provincetown opened in New York with a series of nine bills in

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1. Leaflet [1923]. NYPL.TC.

2. 'Genuine Repertory', New York Times, November 8, 1925.

3. 'The Moscow Art Theatre's Influence on Drama Here', May 4, 1924. Clipping, NYPL.TC.



1916-17. Each play probably received five performances, in a run of Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday and Tuesday.<sup>1</sup> Two weeks intervened between each bill until December 1916, when its members decided for artistic reasons to extend the rehearsal time to three weeks.<sup>2</sup> The ninth and final bill was a review bill, composed of four revivals. In succeeding seasons, the number of bills declined and the number of performances given to each increased. In the season 1920-21, for example, six bills received fourteen consecutive performances each.<sup>3</sup> There was a severe set-back in 1921-22 when a combination of financial pressures and a desire to achieve wider recognition led to the by now familiar expedient of sending successful plays uptown. The first of these was The Emperor Jones, which opened at the Selwyn in December 1920. In 1921-22 there followed O'Neill's Diff'rent and The Hairy Ape, Susan Glaspell's The Verge and George Cram Cook's The Spring. Failure to make money uptown intensified the financial problems and provided the chief reason for an interruption in the schedule for the entire season 1922-23.<sup>4</sup> Then, a successful fund-raising drive during 1923-24 enabled the theatre to announce in 1924 that 'a beginning will be attempted toward a true repertory company'.<sup>5</sup>

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1. 'The Provincetown Players', Minutes, December 3, 1916. NYPL.TC.
  2. 'The Provincetown Players', Minutes, October 22, 1916. NYPL.TC.
  3. See W. Vilhauer, 'A History and Evaluation of the Provincetown Players', Diss. University of Iowa 1965, p.104.
  4. The Provincetown made occasional visits to out of town theatres for special performances.
  5. 'Repertory at the Greenwich Village', Leaflet [1924], NYPL.TC.

The Provincetown alternated new plays and revivals but normally allowed each play to run more consecutive performances. For example, during the two week period between May 19 and May 31, 1924, The Emperor Jones appeared throughout the first week, All God's Chillun Got Wings throughout the second.<sup>1</sup>

The repertory phase lasted only a short period, until 1925. At the end of the 1924-25 season, the Triumvirate freed the Provincetown from its close administrative connection with the Greenwich Village Theatre, and lack of funds prevented its continuing the schedule. There followed only desultory revivals in a series of short runs.

Despite their difficulties in maintaining the repertory system, the Art Theatres were combining to give repertory a tremendous impetus in the mid 1920s. There was the simultaneous introduction of repertory by the Neighborhood Playhouse, the Civic Repertory Theatre, the American Laboratory Theatre, the Provincetown, the Theatre Guild and

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1. 'All God's Chillun Got Wings', TS, May 9, 1924. NYPL.TC.

the New Playwrights' Theatre. The actual dates were as follows: the Provincetown 1924, the American Laboratory Theatre 1925, the Neighborhood Playhouse, the Civic Repertory Theatre and the Theatre Guild 1926, the New Playwrights' Theatre 1927. The introduction of repertory by six of our ten Art Theatres at this time indicates almost certainly that there was a close interchange of ideas, although I have little documentary evidence to prove it. One clear connecting link in addition to the circulation of published manifestos (which I have mentioned) and the network of personal contacts (which I shall look at in Chapter XI, below) seems to have been the commonly held regard for the Moscow Art Theatre, which arrived in New York in 1923. Kenneth Macgowan said that, of the lessons being learned from the Moscow Art Theatre, one of the most important was

the machinery with which a genius like that of Stanislavsky and of Dantchenko could make such acting. This lesson, this machinery is nothing more than the repertory company.<sup>1</sup>

Macgowan was, at that moment, developing a repertory system at the Provincetown. While the American Laboratory Theatre sprang directly from the Soviet theatre, Lawrence Langner corroborated his view that the Moscow Art Theatre was an important stimulant to other American Art Theatres, at least in the case of the Guild, when in 1926 he said in an article on 'repertory',

Those of us who were fortunate enough to witness the perfection of the Moscow Art Theatre a few years ago, with its amazing perfection of acting ensemble, were

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1. 'The Moscow Art Theatre's Influence on Drama Here', May 4, 1924. Clipping, NYPL.TC.



brought to a sudden realization of the ultimate necessity of forming a permanent company.<sup>1</sup>

The Theatre Guild opened in 1919 with a subscription audience and concomitant short-run series of plays. Each play appeared throughout the week, for at least four consecutive weeks. Successful productions often removed to larger theatres for continuous runs to relieve financial pressures: these included St. John Ervine's John Ferguson (1919), Ferenc Molnar's Liliom (1921), Arthur Richman's Ambush (1921), Georg Kaiser's From Morn to Midnight (1922). Because of the frequency with which this occurred, the Guild occasionally owned three productions running simultaneously in different theatres. Kenneth Macgowan saw in these circumstances the convenient beginnings of repertory. In 1921, he suggested that the Guild take advantage of them: he proposed bringing together The Wife with a Smile (1921, by Deny Amiel and André Obey) from the Garrick, Ambush from the Belmont and Liliom from the Fulton and presenting all three plays in the same theatre on the repertory plan. He went so far as to suggest a possible schedule within the week which would allow Liliom five performances, Ambush two and The Wife with a Smile two.<sup>2</sup> But five more years were to pass before the Guild took any action. The management did not immediately endorse the repertory ideal, and when other Art Theatres began to operate the system, the Guild was still hesitant. The hard-headed management had no illusions about

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1. Theatre Guild Quarterly (April, 1926).

2. 'Theatre Economics in Words of One Syllable', December 31, 1921. Clipping, NYPL.TC.

the costs, complexity in administration, even difficulties in advertising, but the artistic advantages, especially in improving conditions for the actor,<sup>1</sup> swung the balance. An early announcement shows the care with which the change was made:

The reception of the experiment by our members will determine whether we shall be able to continue .... If the experiment fails, we shall continue for the rest of the season as we have done heretofore. Indeed, even in the event of the experiment being entirely successful, there may be times when we shall feel free to produce plays without using our repertory company.<sup>2</sup>

The repertory schedule built up each season with new plays. In 1926 the first play failed and was taken off. The next opened at the Guild Theatre, while two more plays rotated at weekly intervals at the John Golden Theatre. The following play joined the second in weekly rotation at the Guild. The sixth opened in special matinées at the Guild, before transferring to the Garrick, where it joined the next play, again in weekly rotation. The last play enjoyed an unlimited run. Here is an example of the repertory part of the total schedule:

	THEATRE GUILD	JOHN GOLDEN	GARRICK
April 11 to April 16, 1927:	<u>The Second Man</u>	<u>The Silver Cord</u>	<u>Right You</u> <u>Are</u>
April 18 to April 23, 1927:	<u>Pygmalion</u>	<u>Ned McCobb's</u> <u>Daughter</u>	<u>Mr. Pim</u> <u>Passes By</u>
April 25 to April 31, 1927:	<u>The Second Man</u>	<u>The Silver Cord</u>	<u>Right You</u> <u>Are</u>
May 2 to May 8, 1927:	<u>Pygmalion</u>	<u>Ned McCobb's</u> <u>Daughter</u>	<u>Mr. Pim</u> <u>Passes By</u>

1. L. Langner, Theatre Guild Quarterly (April, 1926).

2. L. Langner, 'The New Theatre Guild Experiment' [1926]. Clipping, H.TC.

3. 'The Theatre Guild', April 1, 1927. NYPL.TC.

(Of these, A.A. Milne's Mr. Pim Passes By was a revival, from 1921.)

The Guild maintained and developed the system until 1929-30. Repertory facilitated touring, which had begun in 1926-27. In this season, a Guild company visited Philadelphia with Pygmalion. In 1927-28, one company took The Doctor's Dilemma to Chicago and Baltimore, another toured a repertory of four plays. And in 1928-29 a massive expansion of touring occurred to reach the six subscription audiences in Cleveland, Chicago, Pittsburgh, Baltimore, Philadelphia and Boston. The basic organization demanded three companies, each alternating two plays, which moved between the seven cities and brought the six subscription plays to each. In practice there were extreme complications. In the first season, the Guild sent out revivals to the cities outside New York, while producing new plays in New York. At the same time some successful plays were not put into repertory and ran uninterruptedly. The result was that more than ten different plays were in simultaneous production, many in repertory. 'Under this system of "Alternating Repertory", the Guild achieved the greatest period of its entire career'.<sup>1</sup>

The theatre had deliberately not introduced a system of daily changes of play, as exemplified by the Civic Repertory, because of expense. The compromise it did adopt proved profitable for a while but then it too began to founder by 1929-30 because of the new financial pressures which began to build up after the market upset of 1929 and were intensified by four successive unprofitable plays. There were other problems: the complexity and inconvenience undermined

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1. L. Langner, The Magic Curtain (New York, 1952), p.217.



the director Philip Moeller's health. There were internal difficulties over actors' pay, and many company actors left, among them Edward G. Robinson, Dudley Digges, Claude Rains and Henry Travers. The creative energy of the organization dwindled.<sup>1</sup>

Both the New Playwrights' Theatre and the Washington Square Players attempted to introduce repertory but without a great deal of success. Although the Playwrights endorsed the repertory ideal<sup>2</sup> and, in 1927, introduced a system of alternation comparable to those of the Guild and the Provincetown (but without the element of revival),<sup>3</sup> financial shortcomings and the loss of a permanent theatre forced them to retreat. The Players proclaimed a plan 'to introduce a system of repertory'<sup>4</sup> in October 1915, but when the theatre was forced to close in 1916, they had not progressed much beyond the occasional revival interspersed with a series of short-run bills.<sup>5</sup>

Of all the Art Theatres, the Little Theatre least sought to

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1. Ibid, pp.243-46.

2. G.A. Knox and H.M. Stahl, Dos Passos and the Revolting Playwrights (Uppsala, 1964), p.11.

3. Programme for Loud Speaker, March 2, 1927. NYPL.TC.

4. Programme for Helena's Husband, October 4, 1915. NYPL.TC.

5. See Programmes for Love of One's Neighbor, March 18, 1915 and Helena's Husband, October 4, 1915. NYPL.TC.

advance the ideal of repertory either in theory or in practice. ✓  
 Although Ames believed repertory to be wholly good, as his work for the New Theatre in designing the schedule clearly indicates, there was a specific reason why he had doubts about its application in the case of the Little Theatre. At the New Theatre, his management met with considerable difficulty in acquiring sufficient plays of the appropriate standard from American playwrights. Playwrights were not anxious to submit their plays to a theatre which offered only occasional performances over a long period of time. The problem was common to all the repertory theatres. Others however were not so seriously concerned with it as Ames: the Civic and the New Theatre were devoted to some extent to classics; all Yiddish-speaking theatres offered varieties of stock or repertory; neither the Laboratory nor the Neighborhood Playhouse were primarily looking for new plays; the Guild ran its successes to their best advantage; and the Provincetown, the Washington Square and the New Playwrights drew plays from their own coterie. Ames, on the other hand, particularly wished to attract modern plays to a small playhouse where rewards would in any case be limited. Hence the repertory ideal could have no priority. Here there was no subscription audience to interrupt what was essentially a commercial schedule.

But in the beginning, in 1912, there is evidence that Ames wished to do all he could to modify this schedule in the interests of variety of plays. The Brooklyn Citizen published his plan to differentiate between evening and matinée shows.<sup>1</sup> The plays would

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1. February 5, 1912. Clipping, NYPL.TC.

be different, and four to five matinées within the week would give an alternating character to the schedule. Ames also intended to limit the length of runs of all plays.<sup>1</sup> The Little Theatre opened in March with Galsworthy's The Pigeon, running in the evenings from Monday to Saturday with an additional Saturday matinée, and a double bill by Charles Rann Kennedy, running in the afternoons from Monday to Friday. The period of alternations was relatively short, however. In April 1912, Ames announced that economic reasons were compelling him to prolong the run of the evening play for an indefinite period.<sup>2</sup> By late March he had already dropped the Monday and Thursday matinées.<sup>3</sup> At the beginning of the second season (1912-13), he again scheduled a system of alternations<sup>4</sup> then abandoned it before the end of the season. Henceforth the schedule was essentially commercial in character. He removed successful plays to more capacious houses, usually the Booth. There were occasional out-of-town tryouts and tours. The financial problems explain the desultory nature of the schedule which, like that of the New Playwrights' Theatre, allowed often lengthy periods of inactivity between productions.<sup>5</sup> The season

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1. New York Evening Sun, April 6, 1912. Clipping, NYPL.TC.

2. Ibid.

3. New York Sun, March 31, 1912. Clipping, NYPL.TC.

4. New York Tribune, November 24, 1912. Clipping, NYPL.TC.

5. See T.H. Dickinson, 'The Little Theatre', in The Insurgent Theatre (New York, 1917).



1915-16 offered no production at all.

All the Art Theatres thus endorsed the repertory ideal and they all struggled with varying degrees of success to get it into operation. In general, it suffered because of its expense when the theatres found themselves in periods of financial uncertainty. In the interests of preserving the organization, the practice of repertory, like that of intimacy, non-commercialism, co-operative organization and the federated audience, was sometimes modified. To preserve the organization meant preserving the means of continuing to pursue the most central ideal of all - experiment.

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## CHAPTER IX

### EXPERIMENT

A higher standard can be reached only  
as the outcome of experiment and  
initiative.

The Washington Square Players,  
Programme for Interior,  
February 19, 1915. H.TC.

I tried in Chapter IV to describe the non-commercial character of the Art Theatres, suggesting that, unlike the commercial theatres, they used all their financial resources to buy the opportunity to develop their artistic policies in the greatest freedom. They might use some surplus cash to improve their theatres or increase the salaries of their staff; but their aim in these and other ways was almost always primarily to improve the artistic standards of their productions. There was very little profit taking. Any money that came to hand they reinvested in their productions or used as a reserve fund to cover their losses on plays they were sure would never make money. Artistic policy was primary, then, and financial efficiency was merely an adjunct to it, as, indeed, were the ideals of non-commercialism, the theatre co-operative, the federated audience, intimacy and repertory. It is the artistic policies of the Art Theatres I mean to discuss in this chapter.

The Art Theatres wanted to break away from the artistic convention of the commercial theatre. They wanted unrestricted freedom to produce whatever plays they liked in whatever manner they liked. They wanted to be limited only by their own imagination and talent. Their policy was to be 'experimental'. The American Laboratory Theatre announced its intention to 'attempt to accomplish something by experiment',<sup>1</sup> while the plays in the Civic Repertory Theatre schedule were described as 'blazing a new trail'.<sup>2</sup> The

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1. See above, Chapter III.

2. W.P. Eaton, New York Sun, October 16, 1926. Clipping, NYPL.TC.



Jewish Art Theatre hoped that its plays would 'mark a new epoch in the history of the Jewish Theatre'<sup>1</sup> and compared its policies to those of the Moscow Art Theatre.<sup>2</sup> In their manifestos, the Little Theatre announced that it would find a place for the performance of 'unusual plays'<sup>1</sup> and the Neighborhood Playhouse described itself as 'designed as an experimental theatre'.<sup>1</sup> The New Playwrights as much as anybody were 'not afraid of experimentation'.<sup>1</sup> The New Theatre, like the Civic Repertory Theatre, at times expressed dislike of the term 'experimental', but more for the sake of good public relations than as a genuine ideological stance.<sup>3</sup> At the New Theatre, 'devoted to the cause of Art',<sup>1</sup> the director John Corbin admitted, 'we are simply in a position to take a few more experimental chances than the ordinary manager'.<sup>4</sup> The Provincetown was organized 'to afford an opportunity for [playwrights] actors, producers, scenic and costume designers to experiment'.<sup>1</sup> The Theatre Guild compared itself with the other Art Theatres:

We found experimental theatres, small, uncertain, of primitive execution, of limited appeal as all such enterprises must be - and, of supreme importance. We said to ourselves; there is a place for things

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1. See above, Chapter III.
  2. 'H.P.S.', 'The Jewish Art Theatre', Nation (September 6, 1919).
  3. E.g. Winthrop Ames, in Knoxville Daily Journal and Tribune, November 7, 1909; and Eva Le Gallienne, in S. Bowen, Wall Street Journal, September 30, 1929. Clippings, NYPL.TC.
  4. 'Only Three Plays out of Two Thousand', New York Times, December 19, 1909.

that are sincere and beautiful in the theatre ... a place less wide than the commercial theatre, even if it wanted to, could afford to occupy.<sup>1</sup>

And with all the Art Theatres, the Washington Square Players believed 'that a higher standard can be reached only as the outcome of experiment'.<sup>2</sup>

There are difficulties associated with the Art Theatres' use of the term 'experiment'.<sup>3</sup> What the Art Theatres meant by it depended in the first place on the date when they were at work. Certainly many of the aspects of play selection, acting and design which the New Theatre would have considered 'experimental' in 1909 were no longer so - in any sense - by 1927, when the New Playwrights began work. 'Experiment' therefore can only have a general definition in this context: the process of discovering artistic techniques or effects which were unknown; or, more usually, the process of testing and proving artistic techniques and effects which were known in some European theatres but which were unknown or rare in the United States.

In taking the Art Theatres' use of the term as a basis of definition I do so in preference to any more modern usage, which would perhaps describe as experimental only those processes in the theatre which were strictly exploratory, based on untried hypotheses and often conducted in private rather than public. And I acknowledge both that all performances, even simply new performances

1. T. Helburn, 'Art and Business', in 'Historically Speaking', Leaflet, August 24, 1923. NYPL.TC.
2. See above, Chapter III.
3. The connotations of the term have certainly changed since Zola used it, in his Le Roman Expérimental (Paris, 1880), from which the Art Theatres' use of the term probably derived.

of old plays, have experimental aspects in their very nature, and that at the same time there are few clear breaks, few totally new starts - most plays having strong, identifiable roots in conventional practice.

With all the Art Theatres there were some plays and some acting and design techniques which stood out, which might be said to be immediately recognizable as experimental by any historian (just as the first kuppelhorizonte in New York City at the Neighborhood Playhouse and the first stage revolve at the New Theatre are outstanding) and which elicited a response from their audiences, indicating that they too found them experimental. It is this outstanding work to which I shall draw attention. It is not my intention to dwell in detail on all the plays, acting techniques or scenic designs which I shall mention. For such particulars I would refer the reader to the bibliography set out in the second volume, following Appendix C.

With their new artistic policies, the Art Theatres were a prominent part of a wider movement for change. The years before 1909 were not completely static. I have already shown how the Art Theatres related to the general development of playwriting and acting techniques in America.<sup>1</sup> A word should be said here about the similar relationship which obtained in the sphere of design work.

David Belasco, producer and director, had led the way, at

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1. Chapters IV and V.



least until the advent of the New Theatre, in perfecting overhead lighting systems. He was using balcony spotlights in 1907: the majority of theatres were not equipped with them until the 1920s. In using direct lighting in preference to the Fortuny System, he kept pace with European developments. He experimented with elaborate climatic effects in an effort to perfect theatrical illusion.<sup>1</sup> Along the same lines Steele MacKaye designed movable stages to allow the detailed construction of functional, Naturalistic scenery.<sup>2</sup> Taking Naturalism a step further, MacKaye designed what he called a Spectatorium, a vast theatre in which there could be lakes, rain, a rainbow and lighting from sources resembling the sun, moon, or stars. Other designers produced such celebrated technical effects as the 'treadmills' of Ben Hur (1899).

Against this background of developing 'romantic' or spectacular Naturalism, there were voices of opposition many years before the ideas of the Europeans Edward Gordon Craig and Adolph Appia stimulated the Art Theatres into positive reaction. As early as the 1890s, critics like George W. Curtis, Arthur Hornblow and Percy Fitzgerald were heard to complain about the excesses of the scenic artist.<sup>3</sup> Craig himself first began to be published in the United States around 1905.<sup>4</sup>

Following the lead of these critics, the example of European

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1. Cf. L'Assommoir (1879), The Girl I Left Behind Me (1893), The Heart of Maryland (1895), The First Born (1897) and The Easiest Way (1908). See M. Gorelik, New Theatres for Old (London, 1947), pp.160ff.
  2. See B. Hewitt, Theatre U.S.A.: 1668-1957 (New York, 1959), p.236.
  3. 'Editor's Easy Chair', Harper's Monthly (June, 1891), p.151; 'The Mechanism of the Stage', Frank Leslie's Popular Monthly (February, 1895), p.182; and 'What Is "The Scene"?', Living Age (October 23, 1895), p.279.
  4. E.g. 'A Dream of the Future Theatre', in Current Literature (August, 1906), p.177.

touring companies (like those of the Abbey Theatre and Max Reinhardt) and the example of the Art Theatre group itself, experimentation in scene design began to move away from ever more elaborate Naturalism towards more symbolic, decorative work. At Harvard in 1912, a member of George Pierce Baker's 47 Workshop wrote, 'Personally I should like nothing better than a chance to try out and to see others try out some of the new methods of staging suggested by Gordon Craig, Reinhardt and the Irish Players'.<sup>1</sup> And in the same year the Little Playhouse of St. Louis seems to have begun selecting plays with the potential they offered 'to portray the new, decorative type of stagecraft'.<sup>2</sup> The Little Theatre of Duluth, founded in 1914, rarely used Naturalistic settings and preferred, like the Chicago Little Theatre of Maurice Browne, to use curtains, screens and lighting effects. Into the Art Theatre era, Stuart Walker at the Portmanteau Theatre, after 1915, used simple decorative backdrops, reminiscent of the early days of the Provincetown. And after 1916, the Arts and Crafts Theatre of Detroit pioneered the use of skeleton sets. Further visits to the United States by European touring companies,<sup>3</sup> publicity deriving from the Amsterdam Exposition of Theatre Design<sup>4</sup> and publications

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1. Letter from Elizabeth McFadden to the Harvard Dramatic Club, in W.P. Kinne, George Pierce Baker and the American Theatre (Cambridge, 1954), pp.157-58.
  2. C. D'A. Mackaye, The Little Theatre in the United States (New York, 1917), p.137.
  3. E.g. the Abbey Theatre (1913), Granville-Barker (1915), the Moscow Art Theatre (1923) and Max Reinhardt (1924).
  4. January, 1922.

about the new ideas in American periodicals such as Theatre Arts Magazine and books like The Theatre of Tomorrow<sup>1</sup> and Continental Stagecraft,<sup>2</sup> all gave impetus to experiments by American designers. In theatres outside the Art Theatre group, Robert Edmund Jones, who worked with the Provincetown, the Washington Square Players, the American Laboratory Theatre and the Neighborhood Playhouse, gave Anatole France's The Man Who Married a Dumb Wife (1915) an almost abstract setting. He went on to give Richard III (1919-20) a Symbolist treatment and Macbeth (1921) an Expressionist. Experiments in Constructivism emerged in 1926 with, for example, Louis Lozowick's setting of Georg Kaiser's Gas at the Goodman Memorial Theatre and Woodman Thompson's treatment of J.P. McEvoy's God Loves Us at the Actors' Theatre.

The Art Theatre group itself made a very important contribution to this general atmosphere of experimentation, not only in techniques of design, but also in techniques of acting and in the selection of plays themselves. Different theatres were more experimental in some areas than others. The production of plays of a kind uncommon in the United States figured perhaps most strongly at the New Theatre, the Little Theatre, the Washington Square Players, the Provincetown and the New Playwrights' Theatre. The Jewish Art Theatre, the

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1. K. Macgowan and R.E. Jones (New York, 1921).

2. K. Macgowan and R.E. Jones (New York, 1922).



American Laboratory Theatre and the Civic Repertory Theatre were more concerned to develop new acting techniques, while the Neighborhood Playhouse was more interested in dance techniques; and advanced design work featured especially at the Provincetown, the Theatre Guild and the New Playwrights' Theatre. There are, however, examples of experimentation by all the Art Theatres in almost every artistic area, in fact in wider areas than the three I have selected as sufficiently representative.

Before the New Theatre opened, the public was confused about its play-selection policy. The Boston Herald reported that it would prefer American plays, a line taken up by the New York Sun:

The theatre will attempt to include in its repertoire the best work of modern English and Continental dramatists, but since its chief aim is to build up a native American stage, every effort will be made to secure the works of American play-writers.<sup>1</sup>

The producer Abraham Erlanger for his part foresaw a strong diet of Ibsen.<sup>2</sup> Whether such uncertainty was the fault of the founders or their reporters, the real intention of the New Theatre was clear: there would be a balance of all kinds of plays from classical to modern, American to European, differentiated from the typical commercial play only in their consistency of artistic merit.<sup>3</sup> In

1. July 28, 1908; and see 'Letters and Art', Literary Digest (August 8, 1908), p.189.
2. New York World, August 20, 1908. Clipping, H.TC.
3. See above, Chapter III.

1908 the founders had adopted a detailed plan, submitted by Winthrop Ames, in which he proposed that they should produce up to seventeen different plays each season. About one third of these would be classical, that is, plays which had preserved their popularity for more than one hundred years, drawn from Shakespeare, from old English comedy and from the Greek, French, German or Spanish. A further four plays would be untried American plays, another third made up of modern European dramas in translation 'varying the types as much as possible'; and the remainder specially selected to ensure a fine balance, probably a poetic drama and probably one drama by Ibsen.<sup>1</sup>

Such a proposition in 1908 had several experimental characteristics. Classics then enjoyed fewer revivals than they had the previous century. In a market dominated by modern foreign translations, such a commitment towards modern American plays was ambitious. Poetic dramas were uncommon and Ibsen's plays courted financial disaster. The plan was carried broadly into effect. In the first season the New Theatre produced three Shakespearian plays: Antony and Cleopatra, Twelfth Night and The Winter's Tale. The old English comedy was The School for Scandal. There were two modern American plays; The Cottage in the Air and The Nigger; seven modern European plays; and Ibsen's Brand, Act IV, bringing the total to fourteen.<sup>2</sup>

Contemporary critics confirmed that this policy was truly

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1. 'Prospectus', Leaflet, July 13, 1908. NYPL.TC.

2. For full details on these productions, see Appendix C.

experimental and brought plays to New York of a type which were new to almost all theatregoers. The Evening Sun described the schedule as composed of 'daring adventures in the new drama'. The critic Charles Collins was overwhelmed on the day he saw Sister Beatrice, Don and The Nigger:

Altogether it was a day undreamed of in the hopes of the most utopian before the New Theatre came into existence. Those who witnessed all three plays would be either abnormally vast in artistic experience or miserably grudging in enthusiasm if they did not fervently testify to the greatest experience of their theatre-going career.<sup>1</sup>

Another critic observed that the New Theatre was 'not for providing the ordinary theatrical pabulum, but to present plays that diverge from the straight line of conventionality',<sup>2</sup> while Everybody's Magazine put it more tersely: the New Theatre's plays were 'a slap in the face to the old, familiar order of things'.<sup>3</sup>

A number of factors influenced the overall play selection policy as it developed in practice: first the size of the theatre. The large size of the house drew criticism from audiences, but no one was more unhappy about it than Ames himself. He had criticized the house before he saw any plays on its stage and at the end of the first season he listed its ill-effects categorically. In his view it obliterated the quality and effect of all delicate pieces,

1. November 6, 1909; and 'A Great Day of Drama', May 26, 1910. Clippings, H.TC.

2. 'What New Yorkers Are Seeing', December 11, 1909. Clipping, H.TC.

3. 'The Players' (February, 1910).



rendered it impossible to produce most contemporary European plays which were being written for smaller theatres, and destroyed the atmosphere of comedies.<sup>1</sup> This factor prevented Ames from exploring the most modern, intimate, Naturalistic plays which he wanted to do, and deflected the choice of plays much more than he intended towards the spectacular, Romantic kind of play, like The Blue Bird for example, which worked well technically in the New Theatre. These were plays which differed less from the commercial play than for example the delicate, experimental The Cottage in the Air which technically had little hope of success and was soon lost from the repertory. The size of the theatre also contributed to the fact that new plays were hard to find. Ames argued that many contemporary authors were deterred from offering their plays to the New Theatre because of the ill-suited auditorium and stage. They were also deterred by the repertory system in which their plays would only receive a limited number of performances in the short term. Many authors, too, both in Europe and in the United States, were under contract to commercial producers. In these circumstances, the New Theatre ran a playwriting competition for American authors in 1909; but out of the two thousand entries, not a single script was considered to have reached the required standard.<sup>2</sup> The result of these combined factors was to turn the selection of

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1. Winthrop Ames and Lee Shubert to the founders, December 31, 1910. NYPL.TC.
  2. See J. Corbin, 'Only Three Plays out of Two Thousand', New York Times, December 19, 1909.

plays away from contemporary American writers towards the more easily accessible and generally superior work of European writers.

Economic pressures too were always present. Subscribers demanded the regular introduction of new plays while the deficits of the theatre mounted steadily. Under pressure, the New Theatre occasionally resorted to relatively 'safe' plays in its second and final season, plays like Old Heidelberg which were evidently not experimental.

For a variety of reasons, mostly economic, most Art Theatres very occasionally resorted to plays which were generally 'safe', or commercial in character. At the Little Theatre Ames too faced problems which influenced his artistic policy. Here he had the kind of theatre he had wanted while at the New Theatre, but his economic problems, which ironically derived mainly from a house which was too small to support professional productions, were just as severe. He therefore turned more often to less experimental work like The Truth and A Pair of Silk Stockings in later seasons. Because the dearth of American plays of a sufficiently high standard persisted after 1912, he ran another national playwriting contest. Again no plays merited production and few American plays appeared at the Little Theatre after its first full season in 1912.

The earliest seasons at the Little Theatre however had a much stronger experimental character. In this period Ames developed his artistic ideas with less restraint. He saw his purpose to 'deepen and widen' public taste with plays that were entertaining,

unusual and thought-provoking.<sup>1</sup> There were to be no spectacular Romantic plays, no musicals, melodramas or farces. Intimate, Naturalistic plays, sometimes comic, which had so far developed in Europe but not in the United States, were to Ames' taste. He announced the 'unusual idea' of The Pigeon, the 'startlingly original' qualities of The Terrible Meek and the 'novelty' of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. The Pigeon by John Galsworthy, along with later plays by Shaw and Granville-Barker, were advanced plays for the period; Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs was purely children's entertainment, long ignored in the United States; and The Terrible Meek, with its long and uncompromising blackout, would have been considered a bizarre piece for many years after 1912. Of The Pigeon, the critic Acton Davies wrote, 'No play could have better outlined Mr. Ames' policy of producing unusual plays'.<sup>2</sup> The Terrible Meek duly created a 'sensation'.<sup>3</sup> Although Ames never repeated such consistently experimental work after 1912, he maintained his artistic standards to the extent that the World could remark in 1916 that the new production of Hush! 'belongs in every way to that class of entertainment to be expected on

1. See Winthrop Ames, in A. Patterson, 'The Little Theatre and Its Big Director', Theatre Magazine. Clipping, H.TC.; and above, Chapter III.
2. 'The Little Theatre Wins Laurels for Mr. Ames' March, 1912. Clipping, H.TC. For full details of all Little Theatre plays, see below, Appendix C.
3. 'News of the Theatres', March 20, 1912. Clipping, H.TC.



stages ruled by special standards'.<sup>1</sup> And the historian David MacArthur has observed that 'the Little Theatre and its productions were a contradiction to every established rule in the New York commercial theatre'.<sup>2</sup>

The work of the New Theatre and the Little Theatre, with their preference for unspectacular, intimate, thoughtful, Naturalistic comedies in contrast to the musicals, farces, melodramas and Romantic spectacles of a thoroughly unintellectual sort, may not seem radically experimental in an age when 'conventions' may take on meaning only for a particular play and a new 'convention' may appear and disappear with alarming rapidity. But these theatres between 1909 and 1917 were operating within the artistic conventions of the time and, in their way, at the very beginning of a process which would ultimately revolutionize attitudes towards conventions throughout the American theatre, they could be said to be as experimental as were the New Playwrights who burst upon the scene in 1927.

In 1915, the Washington Square Players widened the split between commercial and Art Theatre drama. They would produce 'well-known European authors' who had been 'ignored by commercial managers', but they declared a preference for American plays and

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1. 'The Little Theatre Is Active Once More', October 2, 1916. Clipping, NYPL.TC.
  2. 'A Study of the Theatrical Career of Winthrop Ames: 1904-1929', Diss. Ohio State University 1962, p.257.

carried their preferences into practice.<sup>1</sup> From all their plays they sought 'a sincerity and idealism of spirit such as was rarely found in the more pretentious theatres of Broadway'.<sup>2</sup> They produced the earliest plays of such Americans as Elmer Rice, Eugene O'Neill, Susan Glaspell and Zoe Atkins, and they gave some of the earliest American performances and revivals of plays by Ibsen, Strindberg, Chekhov, Andreyev, Maeterlinck, Schnitzler, Wilde and Shaw.<sup>3</sup> There were very few plays which would have drawn no attention to themselves in direct comparison with the typically commercial play: there were few plays which were 'safe'. Most of the plays were short, one-act in length and they drew on many different styles, from the thoughtful comedies of Philip Moeller to the Naturalistic dramas of Chekhov; from the wordless fantasy of Another Interior to the satirical Licensed and the poetic, exotic Bushido.

Some of their plays shocked the casual visitor, like Salome, or simply bored them, like The Seagull.<sup>4</sup> But over three years their work was characterized as showing 'unflagging devotion to all that is rarest in the drama'. 'Except for one or two pieces',

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1. See above, Chapter III; and cf. 'The Washington Square Players: Announcement', Leaflets, 1916 and 1917. NYPL.TC.

2. [1915]. Clipping, H.TC.

3. For full details of plays, see below, Appendix C.

4. See New York Times, April 23, 1918; and '"Sea Gull" Scores at Dainty Bandbox', Brooklyn Eagle, May 23, 1916. Clippings, NYPL.TC.

said one critic, 'the "regular" stage of Broadway might be searched in vain for a creative touch as distinct and authentic'.<sup>1</sup>

The Players' play-selection policy was not directly influenced either by their expansion and removal to the commercial theatre district or by their ensuing financial problems. But their abrupt disintegration as an organization in 1918 may have owed much to their increasing difficulty in finding the requisite number of plays to fulfil their subscription commitments. To produce one-act plays at the rate of three or four every bill required a large and regular supply of material. Although the Players wrote a number of plays themselves, they could never meet the demand, and many of their authors had left in 1918 to join the armed forces. Further, their work at the larger Comedy Theatre turned the Players more towards full-length plays which were still scarcer and which their own authors could not so easily supply.<sup>2</sup>

Continuing the interest of the New Theatre, the Little Theatre and the Washington Square Players in new techniques of playwriting, the Provincetown took experiment a stage further by at first directing its attention exclusively towards American plays by new American playwrights. In 1917 its members announced that

If any writers in this country, - already of our group

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1. May 19, 1918. Clipping, NYPL.TC.

2. Cf. W.P. Eaton, The Theatre Guild: The First Ten Years (New York, 1929), p.26.



or still to be attracted to it - are capable of bringing down fire from heaven to the stage, we are here to receive and help.<sup>1</sup>

The Provincetown pursued this exclusive policy with considerable artistic success until 1922, when factors similar to those confronting the Washington Square Players at the Comedy Theatre deflected its members from their original goal. Having opened in 1915 with a seemingly inexhaustible supply of one-act plays they considered worthwhile, by 1920 they began to find fewer and fewer plays worthy of their attention. There was a feeling in the group that to maintain artistic standards they should consider a policy more in line with the Players and bring in European plays:

It takes the combined and feverish efforts of the entire Provincetown group to keep the foreign wolf from the door .... Next year, unless there is a speedy change in the calibre of manuscripts, we will produce European dramas rather than American burlesques.<sup>2</sup>

The scarcity of plays was certainly to some extent due to the demands made on playwrights who associated themselves with the Provincetown and who simply could not keep pace with the schedule. But artistic standards were forever rising. The plays they considered important in 1915 were no longer good enough in 1920, particularly perhaps after the outstanding success of The Emperor Jones. Between 1921 and 1922 the members of the Provincetown too, like the Players, were turning to full-length plays. Some of these, like The Hairy Ape, were artistically successful while

1. 'The Provincetown Players', Leaflet, 1917. NYPL.TC.

2. February 27, 1920. Clipping, H.TC.

the one-act form, in contrast, gave less satisfaction. But good full-length American plays were harder to find. In 1922 the Provincetown addressed itself again to its authors:

We have a frank word to say. Founded for you, committed to the steady production of your plays only and with a steady flood of manuscripts almost submerging us, we have faced, notwithstanding, season after season, a discouraging lack of plays worth the doing .... We do not want plays cut to old theatric patterns ... We have always faced so-called 'failure' as the inevitable price of many an experiment, but we have always wanted the experiment to be 'for something'.<sup>1</sup>

When the Provincetown re-opened in 1923, it reasserted its experimental character,<sup>2</sup> but now play selection would include not only modern European plays, but also 'the reinterpretation of old plays', American and European.

After five years, the Provincetown returned to the exclusive selection of modern American plays. Between 1923 and 1928 the group had produced a number of artistic experiments it believed worthwhile, but there was a growing feeling among its members that their period of greatest creativity had been in the years around 1920, despite their difficulties, when every participant existed only to serve the ideas of their own playwrights. The finances, too, which had been in a sorry condition, promised to improve and allow more artistic freedom. Again the Provincetown strove to

add to the aggregate culture of America by the only effective method it knows, the production and encouragement of the American dramatist.<sup>3</sup>

Accepting the fact that financial difficulty formed the background

1. 'The Provincetown Players Announce an Interim', Leaflet, 1922. H.TC.
2. See 'The Provincetown Playhouse Will Be Reopened', Leaflet, 1923. NYPL.TC. Cf. Kenneth Macgowan, in W. Vilhauer, 'A History and Evaluation of the Provincetown Players', Diss. University of Iowa 1965, pp.380-81.
3. 'The Provincetown Playhouse in the Garrick Theatre', TS [1929]. NYPL.TC.

to the later period of the Provincetown's work in which there appeared two plays of experimental note,<sup>1</sup> there were, over the seasons, a great many plays of outstandingly experimental character, some of them extremely influential. This character, over nearly sixteen years, is difficult to sum up. Experiment was of the essence as it had been at the Bandbox, and a variety of forms and ideas emerged. Most plays tended to be in the Naturalistic, often serious, intellectual mould, at least during the early years, whereas the Players had developed a flair for comedy. But the verse play Lima Beans opened in 1916 and there followed plays by Edna St. Vincent Millay in the same vein. Later plays varied from the tragic, Naturalistic Desire Under the Elms with its censorship problems,<sup>2</sup> to the whimsical, satirical comedy Fashion, an ambitious revival of a dated, nineteenth century American play which created a vogue in New York for similar revivals; from the dreamlike Him, one of the earliest American Expressionist works, to O'Neill's dramatization of The Ancient Mariner.<sup>3</sup> The critic Rebecca Drucker visited the Provincetown regularly and wrote:

The day in which the Provincetown Players will know their own minds is, I hope, far off. It will be the end of that buoyant experimenting that is the unique justification of their existence.<sup>4</sup>

Experiment predominated in the presentation of the works of many

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1. Cf. H. Deutsch and S. Hanau, The Provincetown: A Story of the Theatre (1931; rpt. New York, 1959), p.101.
  2. There were several Provincetown plays involved in censorship disputes, including The God of Vengeance, All God's Chillun Got Wings and Fiesta.
  3. For full details of these and other Provincetown plays, see below, Appendix C.
  4. New York Tribune. November 16, 1919. Clipping, H.TC.



other writers: for example the Europeans Strindberg, Arthur Schnitzler and Walter Hasenclever, and the Americans Susan Glaspell, David Pinski, Michael Gold, Paul Green and Upton Sinclair. These were plays which were described by regular critics as 'unusual', 'exceedingly puzzling to the Broadwayite', 'theatre novelties' and plays which 'might wait in vain for a production anywhere except in so adventurous a playhouse as the Provincetown Theatre'.<sup>1</sup>

The Provincetown was the only contemporary theatre which the New Playwrights agreed was experimental. For the rest,

They are afraid to experiment ... They like to produce dainty little costume trifles /i.e. the Neighborhood Playhouse/ and decadent European problem plays /i.e. the Civic Repertory Theatre/ and mystic highbrow morbidities /i.e. the Theatre Guild/.<sup>2</sup>

The New Playwrights in fact looked to outdo all their predecessors, to 'usher in the most important experiment in the American theatre since the Provincetown Players broke its new path'.<sup>3</sup> They rejected almost everything the commercial stage had to offer with its 'familiar permutations of adultery, seduction, perversion and fornication'.<sup>4</sup> That was the 'bourgeois theatre', capable only of producing 'drawing room plays' and 'sophisticated cream puff tragedies'.

1. See H. Broun, 'The Emperor Jones by O'Neill Gives Chance for Cheers', November 4, 1920; and A. Woolcott, 'Second Thoughts on First Nights' /1921/. Clippings, NYPL.TC. And Burns Mantle, in H. Deutsch and S. Hanau, The Provincetown: A Story of the Theatre (1931; rpt. New York, 1959), p.88.
2. M. Gold, 'White Hope of American Drama', March 1, 1927. Clipping, NYPL.TC.
3. M. Gold, 'A New Masses Theatre', New Masses /1927/. Clipping, NYPL.TC.
4. 'The New Playwrights' Theatre', Leaflet, 1927. H.TC.

The Playwrights were to take up new themes--'mass movements', 'machine age conflicts' and 'social turmoil'-to convey a spirit of workers' revolt.<sup>1</sup> To match new themes, there would be a new, Expressionist form.<sup>2</sup>

In practice they lived up to their rather extravagant promises and did not noticeably alter their play selection policy when they had to make other serious changes in their organization. None of their plays could be considered 'safe', although J.H. Lawson had had a success in 1925 with Processional at the Theatre Guild and Upton Sinclair's Singing Jailbirds, produced by Piscator, had been well received in Berlin. All the plays were Expressionistic in form and full of propaganda about the working classes, at a time when Expressionism and class-angled plays had few relations in the commercial theatre.

The critics were often so hostile to their work that judgement gave way to passion. What emerges from the reviews is that the New Playwrights were offering work with little relation to their normal theatregoing experience and that the critics had neither the experience nor, often, the intellectual apparatus to understand it. Frank Vreeland called the Playwrights 'a group of insurgent young intellectual hoodlums simply determined to run amuck in the

1. See J. Dos Passos, 'Did the New Playwrights' Theatre Fail?', New Masses (August, 1929), p.13; 'The New Playwrights' Theatre', Leaflet, 1928. NYPL.TC.; and A. Kandel, New York Times, November 6, 1927.
2. For an account of the interrelationship of workers' theatre and the Expressionist form, which influenced the New Playwrights, see E. Piscator, 'The Social Theatre', in New Masses (July, 1929), p.14.

theatre'.<sup>1</sup> And Percy Hammond, having reviewed their early plays with growing intolerance, lost all restraint with Hoboken Blues. He said it was

the most ridiculous endeavour I have ever seen in a so-called playhouse .... So delirious and incoherent were the proceedings that I, and several drama lovers, bowed out after the second act, fearful that if we remained, we should be tempted to abhor our favourite art.<sup>2</sup>

The New Playwrights had their own explanation for their critics' reactions:

The New Playwrights received what all adventurers must receive. Experiment in the arts is a personal insult to people who have never gone beyond what they learned when they went to grammar school. Change is revolting to people who are self-satisfied.<sup>3</sup>

Experimental playwriting was not the only form of innovation in the Art Theatre movement. As I suggested earlier, experimental acting featured prominently at some of them, notably at the Jewish Art Theatre, the American Laboratory Theatre and the Civic Repertory Theatre. Principally these techniques existed to serve the function of co-operation on stage, that is to say, they were

1. New York Telegram, October 20, 1927. Clipping, NYPL.TC.
2. 'The Theatres', New York Herald Tribune, February 18, 1928. For a complete list of New Playwrights' plays, see below, Appendix C.
3. 'The New Playwrights' Theatre', Leaflet, 1928. NYPL.TC. Cf. B. Fagin, 'A Radical Theatre', Present Day Literature (December, 1929), pp.57-59.



designed to promote harmony and artistic unity between all members of the cast. I have already shown that such unity existed on the stages of all the Art Theatres and that it owed a great deal to a more profound co-operation between members of the organizations themselves. But new acting techniques were also at work in these theatres where unity emerged most strongly.<sup>1</sup>

The critic Ralph Block saw the results of the rehearsal methods of the Jewish Art Theatre in The Idle Inn in 1919:

The sense of life is deeply invested in the play by a different, and, so far as Broadway is concerned, by a new convention of acting. The entrances and exits of the well-accustomed stage, the placing for dialogue are all eliminated here and replaced by something with not such clean-cut edges; a kind of dialogue and action that is much more natural and effective. In this sense, the play from act to act is a growth of illusion, a development rather than an invention. The somewhat meaningless legend of Broadway, the face-to-the-pit legend and all its accompaniments is here entirely lost with excellent results.<sup>2</sup>

In fact Block was describing a standard of ensemble acting which was not new to the Yiddish-speaking theatre. In the first place the limited Yiddish-speaking audience demanded a rapid turnover of plays. The natural organization to supply them, since there was no wider population to support touring companies, was the stock company. And permanent stock companies formed the natural background to finer ensemble work. There were also several Yiddish-speaking actors in America who had served their apprenticeship

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1. See above, Chapter V, pp.152ff.

2. 'The Idle Inn Presented', New York Times, September 22, 1919.

with European troupes and had brought their techniques with them. One such European company, which was later to influence the acting styles of the American Laboratory Theatre and the Civic Repertory Theatre, was the Moscow Art Theatre. The Moscow Art Theatre did not reach the United States as a company until 1922-23, but the Jewish Art Theatre nevertheless had indirect connections with it. Jacob Ben-Ami had been associated with the European Hirshbein troupe which owed a good deal in turn to the Stanislavsky-influenced Vilna troupe. And Ben-Ami has acknowledged the influence of the Moscow Art Theatre on his work.<sup>1</sup> And through Die Freie Yiddish Folksbuehne, Leonidas Snyegoff associated with Leib Kadison, once an active member of the Vilna troupe. Emanuel Reicher's insistence on calling the organization the Jewish Art Theatre may be indicative of his indebtedness to the Moscow group. And the historian David Lifson has said

Most of the writers and leading figures among the Yiddish intelligentsia and theatre folk in New York were cultured Russian Jews. They associated better efforts in the theatre with the Moscow Art Theatre.<sup>2</sup>

In brief, the Stanislavsky 'system' of acting at the Moscow Art Theatre was constructed about the desire to interpret plays more precisely according to their authors' intentions, to make the actor a more efficient tool of the playwright, a notion running

1. In D. Lifson, 'A History of the Yiddish Art Theatre Movement in New York: 1918-1940', Diss. New York University, 1963, p.516.
2. Ibid, pp.30ff.

generally counter to practices prevailing in the United States in 1919, when authorship occupied a lowly station relative to acting in the hierarchy of production relationships and where star actors had elevated themselves above both playwrights and fellow actors. To bring about this precise interpretation, actors were to undertake a number of rehearsal exercises, on their own and with their companies, designed to give them a highly developed awareness of the meaning of their plays and a close sympathy with the characters they were to portray. The Group Theatre popularized the Stanislavsky system in the 1930s, but it was in the Art Theatres that it first received serious attention and where, for example, many members of the Group Theatre received their training.<sup>1</sup>

Before they opened in 1919, the members of the Jewish Art Theatre rehearsed privately for two months as a group at Coney Island. There they began to put into practice their stated intent of taking equal billing, rotating large and small parts, competing for every part and even accepting double casting. They agreed to study their roles seriously, to discuss them and finally to submit them to an overriding authority, built out of consensus and vested in the director. They were prepared to work long hours in rehearsal to ensure that each play achieved artistic unity.<sup>2</sup> So far, at

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1. Its roots go further back perhaps to the 'psychological Naturalism' practised by Mrs. Fiske as early as 1897. The first Stanislavsky-trained player to perform in the United States, Alla Nazimova, arrived in 1905. See G.B. Wilson, A History of American Acting (Bloomington, Indiana, 1966), p.227.

2. See above, Chapter III, p. 85; and Chapter V, p.190.



least, the Jewish Art Theatre went in shifting the emphasis from the actor to the play.

However, even at the beginning the company found it difficult to stick to its principles. Rotating large and small parts for example, worked towards ensuring that stars did not arise from the company and consolidate their position and that every member of the company was given the chance to develop his technique in substantial roles, but it was not consistent with their strong desire to improve artistic standards, if the finest actors were performing as supernumeraries. Pursuit of artistic standards eventually proved the stronger ideal, largely because actors like Jacob Ben-Ami, Emanuel Reicher and Celia Adler were so much more able than the others.<sup>1</sup> Other members of the company were sufficiently ambitious to challenge the authority of the director when they were cast in small roles. Henrietta Schnitzer, wife of the President, tried to use her influence to win more prominent roles and, like some others, refused on occasion to accept the part for which she was cast. She eventually succeeded in securing more prominent roles than her ability or the principles of the company warranted.<sup>2</sup>

These were difficulties however which the Jewish Art Theatre outwardly overcame to some degree. Almost every critic commented on the novel and successful ways in which the company created and

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1. See e.g. I. Goldberg, 'Hirshbein and Ben-Ami', Boston Evening Transcript, June 29, 1920; and S.J. Kaufman, 'Round the Town', New York Globe, September 29, 1919.

2. See Jacob Ben-Ami, in D. Lifson, 'A History of the Yiddish Art Theatre Movement in New York: 1918-1940', Diss. New York University 1963, p.533.

handled individual characterizations down to the least significant, and how it had embodied the largest roles in an even ensemble. At the end of the first season, the critic Walter A. Lowenberg pronounced that

The harmonious blending of the entire company to a sincere and sympathetic interpretation of the playwright's script is the ideal which the Jewish Art Theatre has set itself and which so far has been obtained.<sup>1</sup>

Following the disintegration of the Jewish Art Theatre in 1921, it is to the American Laboratory Theatre we must turn to find the chief American exponents of the Stanislavsky system. The Laboratory was founded shortly after the first visit of the Moscow Art Theatre to the United States (which lasted from January to June 1923) and owed its very existence to that propitious event. The Russians certainly had much wider influence<sup>2</sup> but the Laboratory was one of a very limited number of formal attempts to benefit from the visitors' example. A founder of the Laboratory, Miriam Stockton, recalled its early connections:

Suddenly the Moscow Art came to New York and I heard of the opportunity to study theatre technique with one of its actors ...<sup>3</sup> Upon reading an article Mr. Boleslavsky

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1. Theatre Magazine (April, 1920). Clipping, NYPL.TC.
  2. See e.g. J.M. Brown, New York Post, January 18, 1930. Clipping, NYPL.TC.
  3. Richard Boleslavsky had lectured at the Princess Theatre, New York, for some six weeks in 1923.

wrote about the Moscow Art ... I wrote to Mr. Boleslavsky personally, suggesting that we undertake to build up such a theatre and all that it involved.<sup>1</sup>

Richard Boleslavsky had joined the Moscow Art Theatre in 1906. Before leaving to join the army in 1914, he had directed in the Art Theatre's First Studio. He was with the theatre again in 1917, and then in 1922, after another brief absence, he joined a related touring company which brought him to New York in September in Revue Russe. He remained in the United States to become a leading advocate of the Stanislavsky system. Working with him at the Laboratory was another player from the Moscow Art Theatre, Maria Ouspenskaya. She had joined the Moscow group in 1909 and remained with it until 1922. She visited New York in January 1923 on tour with the Art Theatre proper and, like Boleslavsky, stayed on in the United States after returning once more in 1924.

One quality inherent in the Stanislavsky system was that it could be taught. Its teachers did not claim to be able to create a talent where none existed, but, as Maria Ouspenskaya put it, 'you can and must educate it and help it to develop itself and show its own beauty and force'.<sup>2</sup> To impart the basic techniques of the system and its varied accompaniments to young students was at first the driving motivation of the Laboratory.

Education in acting itself, quite apart from what was being

1. In R. Willis, 'The American Laboratory Theatre: 1923-1930', Diss. University of Iowa 1968, pp.35-36.

2. TS. /1924/. NYPL.TC.



taught, was thought of as 'experimental' and it interested almost all the Art Theatres - the Jewish Art Theatre, the Civic Repertory Theatre, the Neighborhood Playhouse, the Provincetown, the Theatre Guild, the Washington Square Players and even the New Theatre all developed acting schools of some sort. In 1923 and certainly as early as 1909 there were very few acting schools anywhere in the United States. In an advertising leaflet, the Laboratory observed that

Youth has been recklessly wasted on the American stage for generations. Young people flock to New York to try their luck without training, having only zeal and youthful attractiveness to offer.<sup>1</sup>

Courses at the Laboratory instructed its pupils in all the components making up the Stanislavsky system into which Boleslavsky's later published work Acting, the First Six Lessons<sup>2</sup> gives a detailed insight. He prescribed a combination of 'physical exercise', 'spiritual exercise' and 'intellectual exercise'. Physical exercise, involving general fitness and body control, was provided in the classes of 'La Sylphe' and Madame Anderson-Ivantzoff (Ballet and Corrective Gymnastics), Bird S. Larson (Body Rhythm), Elsa Findlay (Dalcroze Eurythmics), James Murray (Fencing) and Mikhail Wordkin (Plastique and Mimeodrama). Vocal control was taught by Margarete Desoff (Voice Production), Margaret McLean (Principles of Phonetics), William Tilly (Correct Speech for the Stage) and Windsor Daggett (The Spoken Word). Spiritual exercises, which pupils were expected

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1. 'The Dramatic School Department', Leaflet, 1927. New York Public Library.
  2. New York, 1933.

to conduct mainly in their own time, were explained in a series of talks by Boleslavsky (The Art of Acting) and Ouspenskaya (The Technique of Acting). Intellectual exercise was offered in such classes as those given by John Mason Brown (The History of the Theatre) and Douglas Moore (Appreciation of Music).<sup>1</sup> The students gradually began to apply their training in basic rehearsals of plays which their teachers selected, to bring out new techniques from subdued Naturalism to energetic mime. They rehearsed for long periods until they were satisfied with their work, exchanged roles, even for public performances, accepted small roles along with prominent ones and submitted to the overriding control of their director.<sup>2</sup>

When the best students were promoted into the Repertory Company they continued to attend classes, sometimes in a supervisory way and to maintain the very flexible system of casting. It was only when the Company had been together for several seasons and had separated from the school that its members began to discard some of the more obviously educational components of their work, such as exchanging roles. Clearly the amateur-pupil background of the Company and the overall authority of Boleslavsky, which his teacher status confirmed, were helpful in maintaining its ideals, features

1. Programmes of the American Laboratory Theatre. NYPL.TC.
2. As an appendix to this chapter, I have included a series of physical, spiritual and intellectual exercises written out by Boleslavsky sometime before he systematized them in his famous book. To my knowledge they have not been published in any form.

which had not been present at the Jewish Art Theatre. But there were difficulties which the Laboratory also experienced.<sup>1</sup> The very talents of Ouspenskaya and, later, Maria Germanova, both of whom acted with the Company, drew attention to themselves and weakened the ensemble.<sup>2</sup> And, after many seasons with Boleslavsky, the Company felt uneasy with Germanova, who disliked too much emphasis on body movement. The group too was limited in its ability to give polished demonstrations of acting based on the Stanislavsky system because its members were all young and inexperienced. Critics immediately recognized their 'Russian training' and warmly praised their ensemble, but they rarely paid them the tribute of comparing their work with professional acting on the commercial stage in every respect.<sup>3</sup>

However, the Laboratory, like the Jewish Art Theatre, surmounted its difficulties and produced work of a notably experimental character. The plays they chose aroused little excitement, for in general they were chosen more with an eye to developing acting techniques than to exploring new kinds of drama,

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1. See 'The American Laboratory Theatre', Catalogue, 1924-25. NYPL.TC.; R. Fricken, 'An Experiment in Play Production', Theatre Magazine (October, 1927); and Maria Germanova, in J. Fitzgerald, New York Post, January 25, 1930. Clipping, NYPL.TC.
  2. See J.M. Brown, 'The Play', New York Evening Post, January 9, 1930.
  3. See 'D. McL.', 'The Letter, the Legend and Hester', Boston Transcript, February 6, 1926; G. Gabriel, 'The Play of the Scarlet Letter', New York Sun, January 8, 1926; and J.B. Atkinson, 'The Play', New York Times, March 7, 1930.



but in the way they enacted them they did demonstrate 'an innate feeling for harmony and pattern', 'an intelligent ensemble' and were capable of exhibiting some of the 'most beautiful performances New York has seen since Stanislavsky's troupe first touched their shores'.<sup>1</sup>

The Civic Repertory Theatre assimilated the same influences of the Stanislavsky system which the Jewish Art Theatre and American Laboratory Theatre so clearly showed. Less systematically than the Laboratory, but in a more sustained way than the Jewish Art Theatre, Eva Le Gallienne developed the acting company of the Civic Repertory away from the commercial, star system towards the methods employed by the Moscow Art Theatre. Her general attitude to acting - the creed which she put into practice at the Civic Repertory - can be pieced together from a number of sources. She believed that stars distorted the interpretation of most plays and that supporting actors who had never worked together before gave little depth to any production. The permanent company should be in a position to give a much fuller, more rounded presentation of any play. Its members would have the opportunity to study a wide variety of roles and develop their skills. Ideally, she believed, they should co-operate to develop their skills by rotating small and large parts. Individuals should cultivate the technique of suppressing their personalities and submerging themselves

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1. 'D.McL.', op.cit.; G. Gabriel, op.cit.; and J.M. Brown, 'The Play', New York Evening Post, January 9, 1930.

in the role created for them by the playwright. The group as a whole should agree on the interpretation of each play and then agree to serve the judgement of a director. For Le Gallienne, as for Stanislavsky, the actor should be a servant of larger artistic forces and not free to express an entirely personal construction in his work.<sup>1</sup>

Some of Le Gallienne's actors actually came from the Jewish Art Theatre and American Laboratory Theatre, among them Jacob Ben-Ami, Frances Williams and Robert H. Gordon, bringing with them their experience of the Stanislavsky system; and for several months, the well known Stanislavsky-trained Alla Nazimova was of the company. Like the Jewish Art Theatre, the members of the company as a whole were diverse in origin, many of them Europeans, but closely related in their endorsement of Le Gallienne's ideals. The actor Paul Leyssac commented that she had

made a definite effort to obtain for her theatre the services of men and women who know that acting is a craft and not a convenient outlet for spontaneous bursts of emotion.<sup>2</sup>

Although Le Gallienne was at pains to point out that hers was not an American 'studio' of the Moscow Art Theatre and that she preferred to adopt the best techniques from every 'system',<sup>3</sup> the

1. In 'A Civic Repertory Theatre', Smoker's Companion (April, 1927), pp.39ff.; 'The Civic Repertory Theatre', Catalogue 1930/7. NYPL.TC.; New York Herald Tribune, March 24, 1929. Clipping, NYPL.TC.; Cumberland News, July 8, 1927. Clipping, NYPL.TC.; and At 33 (New York, 1934), p.168.
2. TS, NYPL.TC.
3. Eva Le Gallienne, in P. Cooper, 'Eva Le Gallienne's Civic Repertory Theatre', Diss. University of Illinois 1967, p.206.

arrangements she actually introduced to the acting company were very similar to those employed by all Moscow-orientated theatres. There were similar difficulties in practice. Le Gallienne herself and fellow actors and actresses, like Alla Nazimova, Josephine Hutchinson and Jacob Ben-Ami, were considerably more talented than the rest of their company, which tended to unbalance the ensemble, and, in the interests of artistic standards, they tended to win the major roles. This imbalance was increased by the economic problems of the Civic Repertory. Quite simply, the theatre could not afford to hire enough male actors of the same quality as their best actresses, which sometimes made for unevenness in performance. And, as at the Jewish Art and Laboratory theatres, the members of the company were not always happy with their 'servitude' in the cause of art. They objected so strongly to exchanging roles when Le Gallienne tried to introduce the practice that she withdrew it almost immediately. Often too they complained about lack of star billing for prominent roles or about the roles for which they were cast. Eventually, both Alla Nazimova and Jacob Ben-Ami left the company on these grounds.

Such difficulties notwithstanding, the Civic Repertory went on to develop a unified and resourceful ensemble of a very high standard. Stories are told of how the actress Ria Mooney once replaced another company actress, Beatrice de Neergaard, in two major roles within forty-eight hours<sup>1</sup> and how the cast of The Women Have Their Way succeeded in making all the important dramatic points when one of their number failed to appear on stage.<sup>2</sup> These were qualities which

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1. E. Le Gallienne, New York Herald Tribune, March 24, 1919. Clipping, NYPL.TC.

2. E. Le Gallienne, With a Quiet Heart (New York, 1953), pp.222ff.



only a permanent company and prolonged and inventive rehearsals could make possible. In the normal course of events, the company could produce a notable effect to which almost every critic responded, with such judgements as 'the ensemble acting was so admirable that it seems ungracious to praise anyone in particular'.<sup>1</sup>

While the Neighborhood Playhouse, like so many of the Art Theatres, reflected the influence of Stanislavsky, there was a special emphasis here on the dramatic value of the dance. The Playhouse contrasted its work with what the Provincetown and the Washington Square Players were doing. At the Playhouse there was less concern with getting across a certain literary quality in drama, more with techniques of the theatre, with exploring a wide range of theatre arts; song, dance and pantomime as well as dramatic dialogue: 'with us, theatre has meant the integration of any combination of forms susceptible of creating a mood'.<sup>2</sup> It was 'a synthetic theatre where lyric as well as dramatic forms could be expressed and interrelated'.<sup>3</sup>

This too was a policy which was essentially experimental. The Playhouse was trying to develop 'forms not of the traditional theatre'. Irene Lewisohn explained:

Isadora Duncan, Louis Fuller, Ruth St. Denis are familiar figures. But there has been no real place on our stage

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1. '"Cradle Song"', Playgoer (January 26, 1927). Clipping, NYPL.TC.
  2. Programme, 1926-27. H.TC. And see above, Chapter III, p. 64; and Joseph Wood Krutch, 'Introduction', in A. (Lewisohn) Crowley, The Neighborhood Playhouse: Leaves from a Theatre Scrapbook (New York, 1959).
  3. 'Address to the Moscow Art Theatre', in Programme for A Burmese Pwé, March 20, 1926. NYPL.TC.

for such artists. An occasional recital with or without an orchestra, an occasional engagement in vaudeville ... that is the only contact our audiences have had with the art of dancing.<sup>1</sup>

At the Playhouse, according to Irene Lewisohn, 'each production we have conceived in part as a dance'.<sup>2</sup> A large proportion of the schedule, especially in the early years, was given up to the Festival Dancers with whom the Players shared the Playhouse. From the festival rituals Thanksgiving (1915) and the Festival of Pentecost (1918), the Dancers worked more and more to set dances to contemporary, even experimental music. They worked for example with compositions by Stravinsky (in Petrouchka, 1916), Debussy (La Boîte à Joujoux, 1917), Charles T. Griffes (Salut au Monde, 1922, and Tone Pictures, 1927) and Prokofieff (Buffoon!, 1924).<sup>3</sup> They also produced visiting dance groups such as the Duncan Dancers.

In the later seasons, the Dancers co-operated more with the Players. Although the dance elements remained largely the business of the Dancers, the policy of the Playhouse was to extend their work into the work of the Players: the Players too they felt, 'must be ready to dance, act or sing, or rather to act to music or without'.<sup>4</sup>

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1. 'Notes Before a Repertory Season (1926)', in Notes from Talks by Irene Lewisohn, Leaflet, p.9. NYPL.TC.
  2. 'Speech in After Dinner Symposium on the Dance, MacDowell Club (1928)', in ibid, p.26. NYPL.TC.
  3. For full details of such and other Playhouse productions, see below, Appendix C.
  4. I. Lewisohn, 'Notes Before a Repertory Season (1926)', in Notes from Talks by Irene Lewisohn, Leaflet, p.9. NYPL.TC.

Even in plays where there was no obvious dance element, the Players were made aware of rhythm in speeches and in the overall structure of the work.

Some of the professional actors, like Ian McClaren,<sup>1</sup> did not take happily to this intermixing of forms which was so much a characteristic of the Playhouse. (It proved the main reason why the Players and Dancers continued as separate groups.) But most critics reacted favourably to the experiments. For one critic, the Playhouse was a 'postern gate to some of the most interesting experiments New York has known in recent years'.<sup>2</sup> And when the theatre closed in 1927, Brooks Atkinson in the New York Times lamented the loss of a unique artistic policy.<sup>3</sup>

There were few aspects of artistic policy which the Art Theatres did not treat experimentally. As well as experimenting in new forms of the drama, in acting techniques and in dance forms, they also explored new ideas for stage design. The Provincetown, the Theatre Guild and the New Playwrights were especially interested in these new ideas and devoted a good deal of their resources and energy to putting them to work.

The Provincetown declared itself in favour of experiment in design from the beginning.<sup>4</sup> In practice it was left very much to

1. 'In the Amateur Days of ....', TS. NYPL.TC.

2. 'A Playout of Israel', December 23, 1925. Clipping, H.TC.

3. 'The End of an Era', May 29, 1927.

4. See above, Chapter III, p.75.



the active designers in the group to decide, usually in co-operation with the author, what was to be done. At first, the group's carpenter, Louis Ell, was credited with most of the settings, which probably indicates that there was relatively little imaginative work in the early years. But the debut of Cleon Throckmorton in 1920 and the many subsequent designs of Robert Edmund Jones soon brought a new dimension to the Provincetown's maturing play selection policy and continued to do so until 1929.<sup>1</sup>

Throckmorton was essentially a 'scene painter' and in the mould of the many owners of scene painting studios whose work filled the commercial theatres of the 1920s. But he endowed his work with an extraordinary artistic sense and brought many innovations to the Provincetown stage.<sup>2</sup> Like other progressive, contemporary designers in the theatre, he showed the influence of the Russian designer, Bakst, whose designs for Diaghilev and Ida Rubinstein were well-known to most New York artists. He liked to use the same masses of colour although he preferred to work with softer tones. At the same time he followed the teachings of another modern theorist whose ideas had not generally passed to the commercial stage, Edward Gordon Craig. While the majority of commercial artists turned out canvases to order, with little real contact with the play or

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1. Throckmorton was credited with twenty-seven designs, alone or in co-operation, Jones with at least ten. See below, Appendix C.
  2. Members of the Provincetown 'discovered' Throckmorton, so the story goes, as he worked at a painting in near-by Washington Square and simply asked him to try his hand at stage design. See R. Brindze, 'Throckmorton's Mud Huts and Castles', American Painter and Decorator. Clipping, NYPL.TC.

production and without individual flair, Throckmorton worked closely from the script in consultation with the author, or director, to get a feel of atmosphere which he could convey artistically, in complete harmony with the ideas of everyone else concerned with the production. To bring about a more perfect unity, he designed the costumes, as to style, colour and texture, as well as the lighting, to harmonize with the setting - the whole to give an unmistakable single and integrated perspective.<sup>1</sup> To achieve fine settings on the simple Provincetown stage with very little money, imagination and art were prerequisite. In taking all the design work into his own hands, Throckmorton capitalized on his ability, creating settings which were more satisfactory than could be managed with immense expenditure by the allegedly wiser producers of Broadway'.<sup>2</sup>

He was associated with several innovations, among them the use of metallic paint, capable of dramatic tone changes as light levels changed, and the kuppelhorizonte, an entirely new scenic device which he lit successfully.<sup>3</sup> He believed that 'every set should be an experiment, an attempt to create something new'.<sup>4</sup>

Robert Edmund Jones took control of all aspects of design in the same way. (Often he both designed and directed productions

1. Ibid. For a brief account of prevalent commercial scene design, see above, Chapter II, pp. 43ff.

2. 'Excited and Obscure' [1921]. Clipping, NYPL.TC.

3. As in The Emperor Jones, 1920.

4. R. Brindze, 'Throckmorton's Mud Huts and Castles', American Painter and Decorator. Clipping, NYPL.TC.

at the same time, so strong was his sense of the need for artistic unity.)<sup>1</sup> He too was interested in lighting, properties and costumes as well as settings. So great was his attention to detail in every area that another designer, Jo Mielziner, recalled how he would try on costumes 'to get the feel of them' before designing the rest of the set.<sup>2</sup> Jones rejected the Naturalistic framework, the dominant form of commercial stage art, even more passionately. 'all my life I have been opposed to Realism', he said,<sup>3</sup>

The stage setting of an artist never seeks to be a complete thing. It is part of something infinite that trails on the ground, but the part that trails opens within the beholders' mind - glorious, grotesque, breathless - vistas that eye has never beheld and there are the vistas wherein the artist has found the essence, and if the artist and beholder be blessed, the beholder finds it too.<sup>4</sup>

His work covered a wide variety of styles from the broadly Symbolist to the more specific Anti-Naturalism of the Expressionist<sup>5</sup> and Constructivist.<sup>6</sup> He was also particularly associated with pioneering the use of masks.<sup>7</sup> His experiments on the Provincetown stage carried over into his work for commercial producers and into his published articles and books. With a handful of contemporary

1. As for example in Desire Under the Elms, The Spook Sonata, Fashion and The Saint.
2. In R. Pendleton, The Theatre of R.E. Jones (Middletown, Connecticut, 1958), pp.22-24.
3. TS, 1952. H.TC.
4. Drawings for the Theatre (New York, 1925), p.13.
5. As in The Hairy Ape, 1922, and Beyond, 1925.
6. As in Desire Under the Elms, 1924.
7. As in The Spook Sonata, 1924.



American designers, Jones was responsible for realizing and popularizing the ideas of Craig and Appia, the 'new stagecraft', on the American stage.

One of Jones' contemporaries, whose work has since generally been recognized as of major significance in developing American stagecraft, was Lee Simonson of the Theatre Guild. Simonson dominated the design work of the Guild productions just as Throckmorton and Jones had guided the Provincetown.<sup>1</sup>

In its manifesto the Guild stated its interest in 'modern methods of production'.<sup>2</sup> The settings were to be of material help in educating an audience towards new theatre experience.<sup>3</sup> As at the Provincetown, there was no distinct house policy vis-à-vis artistic styles. Simonson himself and other designers to whom plays might be entrusted were given a free hand to develop their own ideas: the critic H.T. Parker observed that the Guild

might have gone cubist, or expressionist, or even realist. It might have walked in the ways of Messieurs Baty or Jouvet in Paris, of Herren Jessner or Piscator in Berlin, even turned longing eyes towards Meyerhold and Tairov in the

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1. Designers of lesser importance to the Guild in the period were Carolyn Hancock, who designed seven productions; Jo Mielziner, six; and Sheldon K. Viele, five. Simonson is credited with thirty-two.
  2. See above, Chapter III, p.80.
  3. See Lee Simonson, in W.P. Eaton, The Theatre Guild: The First Ten Years (New York, 1929), p.199.

Moscow of the Soviets ... Instead, the Guild has merely applied to each play the method of production that in its judgement best suited it.<sup>1</sup>

Simonson joined Throckmorton and Jones in developing a new method of working which aimed at achieving artistic unity. Like the Provincetown designers, he helped create a respect for the role of the artist. Authors and directors at the Guild brought the designer into their earliest discussions about the play. After a thorough exchange of ideas, the designer then translated the agreed principles into practical form with minimum interference. Simonson too took the control of designing costumes, properties and lighting into his own hands:

I always insisted on doing the lighting and the costumes as well as the settings for all of my productions as I think it is the surest way of achieving the unity - emotional, pictorial and dramatic - that is essential to a performance.<sup>2</sup>

He experimented in a wide range of styles from the Symbolist to the Constructivist,<sup>3</sup> and his work was sufficiently striking in its freshness to draw close attention from the critics. Of his Expressionist Man and the Masses for example, Alexander Woollcott expressed the view that the Guild simply chose to put on the play as a vehicle for experimental design.<sup>4</sup> The New York World found

1. Boston Transcript, April 13, 1929. Clipping, H.TC.
2. Letter to Mrs. Josephine Paterek, April 5, 1960. NYPL.TC.
3. See for example The Faithful, 1919 (Symbolist); Man and the Masses 1924 (Expressionist); Dynamo, 1929 (Constructivist).
4. 'Lee Simonson for the Defense'. Clipping, H.TC. For full details of these and other plays designed by Simonson, see below, Appendix C.

'the Generator Room' set of the Constructivist Dynamo so interesting and novel that it published an illustration of it.<sup>1</sup>

Attention to detail was not a quality for which commercial designers were renowned. Simonson, like many of his fellow experimentalists, took the greatest pains to familiarize himself with the whole background of his plays as to historical period and place. When he was designing Dynamo, for example, he visited the General Electric plant at Stevenson, Connecticut, and used many of the ideas he derived from it in his finished designs.<sup>2</sup> In Back to Methuselah (1922), he designed the earliest projected scenery in the United States.<sup>3</sup>

A number of factors influenced the whole context of designing towards the experimental at the Guild as they had at the Provincetown. While the Guild had a much more fully equipped stage, the financial resources of the theatre were not always in better condition. Lack of money almost certainly encouraged the Symbolist approach to settings where imagination and craft could supersede much of the bulky and expensive Naturalistic designs. It may have accounted for Simonson's use of screens in The Faithful (1919) and his use of projections in From Morn to Midnight (1922).<sup>4</sup> In the same way the pressures of repertory and touring certainly encouraged the design

1. See M. Gorelik, New Theatres for Old (London, 1947), p.20.

2. L. Simonson, The Stage Is Set (New York, 1932), p.120.

3. Ibid, p.334.

4. See T. Helburn, A Wayward Quest (Boston, 1960), p.120.



of 'universal' pieces of scenery, pieces which could be used in more than one play at the same time. This was both simpler and more economical.<sup>1</sup>

Whether economic factors in part influenced the New Playwrights in their choice of relatively economical Constructivist settings for all their plays, there is no clear evidence, but it would be a reasonable supposition. For their part, the Playwrights let it be known that they were creating 'a new stage architecture' to help express the ideas in their plays more effectively. To create a revolutionary theatre, they wanted 'to work with new tools'.<sup>2</sup> One of their few friendly critics, Bernard Smith, understood their reasoning:

The very nature of the modern radical play, involving mass action, fluidity of movement and reality that transcends mere photographic reproduction, usually invites revolutionary treatment and frequently demands it. The really great revolutionary theatre is therefore revolutionary in both theme and method.<sup>3</sup>

These ideas and the selection of the Constructivist method the New Playwrights derived in large part from the European, Erwin Piscator;<sup>4</sup> but in America their work was radical. In 1927 they announced rather extravagantly that 'New Yorkers will have the first

1. As in for example Marco Millions and Volpone (1928).

2. J. Dos Passos, 'Did the New Playwrights Fail?', New Masses (August, 1929), p.13.

3. New Masses (March, 1928), p.23. Most critics did not accept this reasoning. They argued that the Playwrights could best serve their purpose by using the most traditional forms to clothe their ideas. See for example K. Fearing, 'Hoboken Blues', New Masses (April, 1928), p.27.

4. See 'The Social Theatre', New Masses (July, 1929), p.14.

chance to see a real constructivist set'.<sup>1</sup> And throughout their activities, the novelty of their sets, by a number of different designers, almost invariably featured in critical reviews.<sup>2</sup>

In treating the theatres in the Art Theatre group selectively in this chapter, I hope I have shown how their experimental work touched almost every area of artistic policy. In doing so I have inevitably neglected a great deal of experimental work, for almost every Art Theatre engaged in broadly venturesome play-selection policies, acting techniques and design work. To summarize and fill in some of the gaps, I will mention some of the more important innovations in all three fields of each Art theatre in our group.

After 1909, the New Theatre began to bring together a repertory of classic plays, to introduce American plays of finer quality like The Cottage in the Air (1909) and The Nigger (1909) and to produce such novel European works as Ibsen's Brand (1910). It formed a relatively stable acting company to give depth to the playing<sup>3</sup> and

1. M. Gold, 'White Hope of American Drama', March 1, 1927. Clipping NYPL.TC. Models of 'real' Constructivist sets had been on general display in New York at the International Exposition early in 1926.
2. See for example J.B. Atkinson, 'The Play', New York Times, March 4, 1927; and J.B. Atkinson, 'Village Mummings', New York Times, February 26, 1928. For full details of all New Playwrights' plays, see below Appendix C.
3. See J.H. Jennings, 'A History of the New Theatre in New York', Diss. Stanford University 1953, pp.238ff.

created some notable scenic effects with its new lighting system and stage revolve.<sup>1</sup> Between 1912 and 1917, the Little Theatre produced plays by Galsworthy, Shaw and Granville-Barker, a play especially for children and deliberately shocking pieces like The Terrible Meek (1912) and also used its stage revolve to good effect in stage design.<sup>2</sup> From 1915 to 1927, the Neighborhood Playhouse furthered the works of the Europeans Shaw (1915), Lord Dunsany (1915), Chekhov (1916), Leonid Andreyev (1919), W.B. Yeats (1923) and James Joyce (1925); and the Americans Susan Glaspell (1917), O'Neill (1922) and Francis Faragoh (1927). It also performed the music of composers like Stravinsky (1916), Charles T. Griffes (1917), Debussy (1917) and Prokofieff (1924). The Playhouse joined the many Art Theatres which were interested in the Stanislavsky system of acting, hiring the services of Stanislavsky-trained directors, like Richard Boleslavsky, and enjoying a visit from the Moscow company itself in 1926 at which the Playhouse acknowledged its debt.<sup>3</sup> It developed the dance as a dramatic form. It claimed to use the first moving, projected scenery in Clavilux (1922)<sup>4</sup> and designed one of the earliest Constructivist sets for

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1. 'Marvellous Light Effects' [1910]. Clipping, H.TC.

2. See 'Galsworthy's New Play', Boston Evening Transcript, March 12, 1912.

3. See Alice Lewisohn, 'A speech to Mr. Nemirovitch-Dantchenko and His Company', TS, February 11, 1926. NYPL.TC.

4. See Programme for Clavilux, January 10, 1922. NYPL.TC.



Pinwheel (1927). Between 1915 and 1918, the Washington Square Players furthered the works of the Europeans Andreyev, Chekhov, Ibsen, Maurice Maeterlinck, Schnitzler, Shaw, Strindberg and Wilde; and the Americans Zoe Atkins, Susan Glaspell, Eugene O'Neill and Elmer Rice. They extended the notion of ensemble in their acting,<sup>1</sup> brought in mime and dance<sup>2</sup> and used a number of Symbolist design techniques such as curtains, in Another Interior (1915) and screens, in Bushido (1916). The Provincetown, between 1915 and 1929, concentrated its attention on new plays by American authors, producing the earliest experimental works of O'Neill (1916), Alfred Kreymborg (1916), Susan Glaspell (1916), Michael Gold (1917), Edna St. Vincent Millay (1918), Djuna Barnes (1919), Theodore Dreiser (1921), Paul Green (1926), E.E. Cummings (1928) and Upton Sinclair (1928). In its later years, it furthered the works of the Europeans Arthur Schnitzler (1920), Walter Hasenclever (1925) and August Strindberg (1926). The Provincetown gave impetus to the idea of ensemble acting<sup>3</sup> and many of its members attended early organizational meetings at the Stanislavsky-inspired American Laboratory Theatre. It brought in modern dance techniques.<sup>4</sup> It provided the opportunity for designers Cleon Throckmorton and Robert Edmund Jones to explore Symbolist, Expressionist and Constructivist forms and to develop

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1. See 'The First Nighter', May 23, 1916. Clipping, H.TC.

2. As in Another Interior (1915) and Bushido (1916).

3. See 'Repertory at the Greenwich Village', Leaflet, 1924. NYPL.TC.

4. As in Fiesta (1929), with dances staged by Tamiris. See J. Martin, 'The Dance, a Vital Part of the Theatre', New York Times, October 6, 1929.

new techniques towards achieving greater harmony between the different areas of design and between the overall design and the other elements of production. In addition it explored the dramatic properties of the mask. Between 1919 and 1930, the Theatre Guild challenged traditional commercial drama by producing the works of such Europeans as Tolstoy (1920), Strindberg (1920), Shaw (1920), Molnar (1921), Andreyev (1922), Kaiser (1922), Capek (1922), Ibsen (1923), Toller (1924), Werfel (1926) and Pirandello (1927); and such Americans as Elmer Rice (1923), Sidney Howard (1924), J.H. Lawson (1925) and Eugene O'Neill (1928). During this period, the Guild too became caught up in the general interest in the acting techniques of the Moscow Art Theatre. It furthered the movement towards ensemble in the United States by adopting a permanent company and attempting to rotate large roles.<sup>1</sup> It provided the opportunity for Lee Simonson to explore new forms of design, in ways which could bring about greater artistic unity. He introduced and developed the techniques of projected scenery and modular sets. Between 1919 and 1921, plays by Sholem Aleichem, Sholem Asch, Ossip Dymov and Perez Hirshbein were put on by the Jewish Art Theatre, plays which would otherwise have been unlikely to have found another stage. The Jewish Art Theatre developed ensemble acting techniques before the Moscow Art Theatre visited the United States and drew particular

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1. See H. Westley, in W.P. Eaton, The Theatre Guild: The First Ten Years (New York, 1929), pp.181ff; and L. Langner, The Magic Curtain (New York, 1952), p.169. In 1923, the Guild actually wanted to send some of its actors to Moscow to train under Stanislavsky, but insufficient money prevented anyone going.

attention to its indirect lighting experiments.<sup>1</sup> Between 1923 and 1930, the American Laboratory Theatre introduced Thornton Wilder to the New York public, pioneered the Stanislavsky system of acting, concerned itself with developing the dance form and produced novel, stylized designs for The Scarlet Letter (1926). Between 1926 and 1933, the Civic Repertory Theatre produced the works of the Europeans Chekhov (1926), Ibsen (1926), Andreyev (1929), Tolstoy (1929), Schnitzler (1930) and Molnar (1932), and the American Susan Glaspell (1927), all authors whose work had already been produced by other Art Theatres in the group, but whose work could still be regarded as 'advanced', if not radical. The Civic, like the Little Theatre, also produced plays for children.<sup>2</sup> It too drew on the ensemble techniques the other Art Theatres had developed and created a great deal of interest in its Tenniel-inspired designs for Alice in Wonderland (1932). And between 1927 and 1929, the New Playwrights' Theatre introduced Expressionist, class-angled plays by its own playwrights, sought to build up a stable company of actors,<sup>3</sup> brought in contemporary dances like the Ku Klux and the Black Bottom and built some of the first purely Constructivist sets in the United States. Despite the many problems of finance, artistic standards, personality clashes and others I have mentioned, the foregoing is surely a formidable vindication of the ideology of experiment to which our Art Theatres had dedicated themselves.

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1. See R. Drucker, 'The Jewish Art Theatre', Theatre Arts Magazine (July, 1920), p.224.

2. Peter Pan (1928) and Alide in Wonderland (1932).

3. See A. Kandel, New York Times, November 6, 1927.



## APPENDIX

There follows a series of physical, spiritual and intellectual exercises written out by Richard Boleslavsky under the title 'The Creative Theatre' before he systematized them in his famous book. They refer back to my treatment of Boleslavsky's work on p.336 above. To my knowledge they have not been published in any form.

1. Bringing yourself into a happy frame of mind and complete spiritual ease, concentrate on your primary feelings: seeing, hearing, feeling, smelling and taste (the first three with real objects, the last two with imaginary ones).
2. Remember all the details of the day and mark every one of its sad and happy moments.
3. Remember last New Year's day and decide whether during the course of it you experienced more sad or gay moments.
4. Remember the gown you had on, the day you experienced an event of great importance.
5. Say mentally the Lord's Prayer, realizing the vital significance of every one of its words.
6. Inhale and exhale evenly and deeply several times in succession, trying to feel and understand the work of your lungs.
7. Listen to the beating of your own heart, trying to understand its work.
8. Transmit mentally to any living person your blessing and the wish for complete happiness.
9. Recall your last anger or irritation, trying to justify it or reproach yourself for it.
10. Remembering your last strong emotion, try to retain it for a certain period of time.
11. Remain in a good or bad mood for a certain definite period of time (the time should gradually be increased from a few moments to several hours).
12. Compare two paintings, or two pieces of sculpture, trying to discover the essential difference between them.
13. Try to analyze and to understand the mood of a certain person you have just met.
14. Recall in your mind any time you wish and try to retain for a certain time the mood that particular time generally brings to you.
15. Create in your mind a mental picture of all the sets in full

colours and other details of a play you have just read.

16. As you walk, or while you do some physical exercises, keep different moods, beginning with the simplest ones and increasing them gradually up to the most complicated rhythm of your inner feelings.
17. Take a certain pose and keep it for a specified period of time without moving.
18. Transmit mentally to someone an order (don't expect an immediate result).
19. Go over one of the roles you have studied or over a familiar poem without saying the lines aloud but simply using the corresponding moods and emotion.
20. Arouse in yourself, according to your own choice a certain feeling, then transmit it to some imaginary being like the spirit of a deceased friend or a phantom of a forest and get a response from it that will bring you to the state of peace or alarm.

## CHAPTER X

### NON-COMMERCIALISM, PART II

We have only two weeks of peace left and then the fray begins again! I hope to God things will go well.

Letter from Eva Le Gallienne to Katherine Cornell. NYPL.TC.



In pursuit of the ideals discussed in the last five chapters, the Art Theatres would have had at least to have come to terms with non-commercialism in practice. In fact they simultaneously elevated non-commercialism to the status of an ideal. Their ideals, as I have suggested, often served a dual purpose. Not only did they express the frustration felt for the commercial theatre and the desire to create something different, they could also combine to provide a suitably secure economic base. The theatre co-operative provided an economical labour system, the federated audience a reliable income, intimacy cheaply maintained premises, repertory a full schedule for permanent actors and audiences, and experiment the possibility of imaginative rather than elaborate, costly work. But, ironically, the same ideals could be tremendous economic burdens in practice if, for whatever reason, a theatre had hit a bad patch (and bad patches were forever imminent in the first place because every organization chose to live in a continually vulnerable state, putting any profits or excess cash at risk again in new experiments). Amateur standards, an audience which required a rapid turnover of new plays, limited theatre capacity, the irregular nature of repertory and the generally uninviting nature of experiment could all combine to impede an Art Theatre's box-office. Then again, when the Art Theatres expanded, as they often did, professionalizing and improving their facilities to reach higher artistic standards or to attract bigger audiences, the same ideals tended to prevent increased income meeting necessarily greater expenditure, or to exaggerate economic problems which already existed.

In the five preceding chapters, I have tried to show how

financial problems were primarily responsible for those modifications that Art Theatre ideals suffered. In this chapter, I shall attempt to show how serious these underlying problems were and what further ways and means the Art Theatres explored to improve their positions.

Winthrop Ames established the financial basis of the Little Theatre with very slight hopes of balancing his books through the box-office.<sup>1</sup> Clearly, if the organization was to prove viable, Ames himself was going to have to provide a measure of private subsidy. In practice the necessary subsidy was quite considerable. In December 1912, a press report stated that the theatre was actually proving profitable, 'an agreeable surprise'.<sup>2</sup> But Ames' carefully kept production notes show otherwise. His first production did relatively well, even allowing for additional house expenses (rent, insurance, maintenance, staff and utilities). But his

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1. See above, Chapter IV, pp.117ff.

2. Clipping, H.TC.

subsequent productions began to lose heavily.<sup>1</sup> Over a period of four and a half seasons, his box-office income did little more than offset actual production investment (the sum spent on a production before opening night, including sets, costumes and salaries). Taking a conservative estimate of additional house and production costs, royalties and miscellaneous expenses, his losses probably exceeded \$150,000. This estimate is supported by a report in the Boston press, in 1924, which gives details of Ames' submission to the board of tax appeals. He wished to be allowed to make tax deductions on the grounds that his producing ventures had made consistent losses. For the relevant period these losses were:

<u>1.</u> <u>PLAY</u>	<u>PRODN. COST</u>	<u>SALARIES</u> <u>PER WK.</u>	<u>TOTAL EXP.</u>	<u>TOTAL INC.</u>
<u>Pigeon</u>	\$2,693.06	\$1,570.00	\$18,393.06	\$34,440.00
<u>Meek/Han</u>	6,894.90	1,425.00	18,294.90	4,318.00
<u>Snow White</u>	16,681.32	1,606.00	45,589.32	38,966.60
<u>Rutherford</u>	2,370.87	1,350.00	18,570.87	25,548.48
<u>Prunella</u>	18,201.31	1,855.00	31,361.31	26,778.14
<u>Philanderer</u>	6,563.18	1,025.00	21,938.18	35,983.82
<u>Truth</u>	5,266.76	2,078.50	23,973.26	28,861.80
<u>Stockings</u>	4,859.31	1,522.00	50,519.31	100,824.12
<u>Hush</u>	5,571.71	1,640.00	17,051.71	14,427.27
<u>Pierrot</u>	5,385.99	1,500.00	23,385.99	48,919.00
<u>Morris</u>	8,601.40	1,945.75	18,330.15	6,727.50
		<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>287,407.06</u>	<u>365,794.73</u>

NYPL.TC. These figures involve the following calculations:  
 a) extension of 'average performance income' in the production notes to 'total income'; b) extension of 'salaries per week' to make up 'total expenditure'. This last calculation involves allowing the equivalent of two extra running weeks to cover rehearsal time.



1912 \$27,818; 1913 \$46,598; 1914 \$88,256; 1915 \$33,868; and 1916 \$34,139.<sup>1</sup> These several sums, which total \$230,679, included losses from producing ventures other than the Little Theatre (viz. the Booth Theatre) but, if it is reasonable to regard the Little Theatre as his most experimental enterprise, then \$150,000 lost here would seem to be a likely proportion. Deficits accumulated throughout the theatre's active seasons. Even such relative successes as A Pair of Silk Stockings (1914) would scarcely have broken even over a thirty week run.

In answer, Ames did very little to improve his position. His single most important measure, as I have suggested,<sup>2</sup> was to contract his activities: to modify his ideal production schedule and produce fewer plays. Only so long as Ames himself was prepared to make up the deficits did the Little Theatre remain viable.

The Little Theatre, unlike most Art Theatres, did not experience the process of expansion which could make for greater economic vulnerability, but its cumulative debts had the effect of increasingly impeding the smooth progress of the organization as time passed. An expansion process could aggravate difficult financial circumstances as it did at the Neighborhood Playhouse

1. Boston Globe, August 29, 1924. Clipping, H.TC.

2. See above, Chapter VIII, p.304.

with its similar economic base. As with the Little Theatre, it is possible to estimate basic expenses on Grand Street in the early years. At 10% of capital investment, annual rental would have been \$15,000. Cleaning and supervision cost \$2,450; 8, Pitt Street rental (after 1916) \$2,435; general expenses and repairs \$500; insurance \$3,000; heat and light \$1,920; office \$250; and miscellaneous needs \$235.<sup>1</sup> This makes a total of \$25,790. Production costs were kept within a small budget, running to about \$1,500 for each bill. There were few professional services to pay for, making for low running costs (salaries, royalties and upkeep of the show) so that box-office income could go some way towards covering house expenses. The margin of deficit remaining, not at first so large as it had been at the Little Theatre, was met by the Lewisohn sisters.

Between 1915 and 1927, production expenses remained relatively stable, but running costs increased dramatically as the Playhouse professionalized its staff in an effort to raise its standards. For example, in 1920 company salaries alone cost \$31,000,<sup>2</sup> more than the total budget of 1915. The Playhouse took action to offset its rising costs: as well as modifying its ideals, it raised box-office prices, introduced a subscription system, sublet a part of 8, Pitt Street, sublet the theatre itself to other companies and offered lectures on theatre arts to the general public. Still as

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1. 'Special Classes and Workshop', TS, 1922. NYPL.TC.

2. TS. NYPL.TC.

annual deficit of around \$20,000 in 1916 rose to \$45,000 in 1921.<sup>1</sup> The Lewisochns were in no position to meet as large demands as this. To relieve some of the burden, they organized a committee of patrons to provide additional support. Here there were such prominent New Yorkers as the lawyer, George Alger and the settlement house founder, Lillian D. Wald.<sup>2</sup> The philanthropist Mrs. Willard Straight, wife of the diplomat and financier, son-in-law of William C. Whitney, may also have been associated with fund-raising.<sup>3</sup> But the Lewisochns themselves probably contributed most of the necessary funds. At times betraying an air of desperation, their executive resolved to cut down on the use of telephones, light and even cleaning women.<sup>4</sup> Such was the economic background to the decision to contract activities radically, to close the theatre for one year in 1922.<sup>5</sup>

After the year's interim, the Playhouse reopened for a period, during which the Lewisochns and their associates continued to lose money at the rate of around \$50,000 each season. In 1927 therefore, the Lewisochns finally decided that the limits of their ability to subsidize the theatre had been reached. Their decision meant the

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1. TS, 1921. NYPL.TC.

2. See Neighborhood Playhouse Programmes, 1915-27. NYPL.TC.

3. See 'The Neighborhood Playhouse', Minutes, May 27, 1922. NYPL.TC.

4. See 'The Neighborhood Playhouse', Minutes, September 22, 1921. NYPL.TC.

5. See 'The Neighborhood Playhouse', Minutes, May 27, 1922. NYPL.TC.



end for the Playhouse as it was then constituted. Over a period of some twelve seasons, Variety reported, they had personally lost over \$500,000.<sup>1</sup>

The New Playwrights never had the opportunity to compound their difficulties by expanding, so suddenly and seriously were they crippled by lack of funds. At the 52nd. Street Theatre they failed to meet their expenses through the box-office or by way of subscriptions. At the end of the first half-season, they had lost their patron's original 'loan' of \$15,000 and another \$13,000 as well.<sup>2</sup> They had brought Fiesta to the brink of production, even to the state of having programmes printed, before they became so desperately short of money that the very running expenses would have been unsupportable. This was a costly error. It forced the Playwrights to leave the fringes of the commercial theatre district and take up residence in Greenwich Village, for which they received a further \$15,000 from the banker Otto Kahn to make a new start. It also led to the Basshe 'report' of 1927 which wrestled with their economic problems and came at last to the lame conclusion that 'the budget ... [is] fundamentally more important than the play'.<sup>3</sup> Basshe proposed rigid economies: a maximum budget of \$1,500 per

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1. 1927. Clipping, H.TC.

2. G. Knox and H. Stahl, Dos Passos and the Revolting Playwrights (Uppsala, 1964), pp.84-85.

3. Ibid., pp.77-78.

week, female administrative staff drawing smaller wages and a limit of \$50.00 per week for actors' salaries. Although such proposals were never put into effect, the Playwrights were chastened by their uptown experience and certainly more careful of their resources. As a result, they lost roughly the same sum of money in the full second season as they had lost in the half-season in 52nd. Street. Their expenses were still considerable. They spent over \$3,000, for example, in improving the facilities of the Cherry Lane Theatre, which then cost \$4,000 per year to rent. Permanent staff salaries cost about \$16,000<sup>1</sup> and, added to office, heat, light and miscellaneous expenses, brought their total basic liabilities to \$26,816.<sup>2</sup> Although production and running expenses were kept at the most modest level that their artistic standards, in competition with their spirit of economy, would allow (The Belt for example costing \$1,078.48 to produce), their income was even lower: The Belt brought in \$5,586.44, The Centuries \$3,603.36, The International \$3,017.31 and Hoboken Blues \$3,781.62.<sup>3</sup> The operating loss was \$27,292.63.

The Playwrights tried to increase their income from different sources. They organized fund raising suppers, sold their plays and finally took the most unusual step of setting up a small chain

1. If they were retained the full year.
2. 'Balance Sheet', November 12, 1927, 'Appendix C', G. Knox and H. Stahl, Dos Passos and the Revolting Playwrights (Uppsala, 1964), pp.218-19.
3. 'Balance Sheet', August 15, 1927 to July 31, 1928, in 'Appendix D', ibid, p.220. It is not clear whether this includes subscription income - which amounted to \$1,630 in November 1927. Ibid, p.219.

of shops, the profits of which might build up a 'sinking fund' for the theatre. To stock the 'En-Fi-Ti' shops (i.e. 'N.P.T.') as they were known, the Playwrights solicited goods of all kinds, 'from bookends to machine-age furniture',<sup>1</sup> which would be donated to the shops and sold in the normal way. There was a management committee of sympathetic, socialist artists and other intellectuals, including Louis Lozowick, Remo Buffano, Hugo Gellert and George Granich. When the Playwrights decided to produce Singing Jailbirds, they approached the author, Upton Sinclair, asking him to help raise production capital for his play.

But their primary means of support still rested with Otto Kahn's millions. To May 1928, Kahn had contributed a massive total of \$53,000.<sup>2</sup> When the second season proved as unprofitable as the first, however, the New Playwrights' Theatre faced the same problem which had confronted the Little Theatre and the Neighborhood Playhouse when their single main sources of subsidy collapsed. Kahn withdrew his support. Already in November 1927, he had become suspicious that funds were being misappropriated.<sup>3</sup> At the end of the season he wrote:

there is a limit alas to what any one man can do to be of financial service to art and artists and I am afraid that for the time being, the limit of 'capacity to pay' in my case has been reached, if not surpassed.<sup>4</sup>

The Playwrights struggled on for a further season, retreating to

1. TS, October 26, 1928. NYPL.TC.

2. M. Goldstein, 'Theatrical Insurgency in Pre-Depression America', Theatre Survey, 2 (1961), pp.35ff.

3. Letter to the New Playwrights, November 15, 1927, in G. Knox and H. Stahl, Dos Passos and the Revolting Playwrights (Uppsala, 1964), p.79.

4. G. Knox and H. Stahl, op.cit., p.81.



modest office premises, with some help from the En-Pi-Ti shops and their other fund raising schemes, but they disbanded in 1929 to avoid adding to their debts. 'Lack of support', reported the Times, was 'the main reason given for the dissolution of the group'.<sup>1</sup>

The various expedients which the Art Theatres could employ to counteract worsening financial positions which I have educed so far - modifications of ideals, contracting activities and development of alternative sources of income - were apparent at the Civic Repertory Theatre. Expenses at the Civic Repertory were on a bigger scale. The average weekly outlay was \$12,700:<sup>2</sup> as much as the Neighborhood Playhouse might spend in production costs over two years. Production expenses could reach as much as \$23,000, as in the case of Alice in Wonderland,<sup>3</sup> and the nucleus of the acting company, formed by Le Gallienne, Paul Leyssac, Leona Roberts, Sayre Crawley, Alma Kruger, Donald Cameron and Josephine Hutchinson earned about \$1,000 per week as a group.<sup>4</sup> But the theatre could earn a weekly maximum of only \$9,500 at the box-office.<sup>5</sup> The result

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1. April 26, 1929. Clipping, NYPL.TC.

2. Paul Cooper's calculation, in 'Eva Le Gallienne's Civic Repertory Theatre', Diss. University of Illinois 1967, p.255.

3. J.B. Atkinson, New York Times, February 2, 1933. Clipping, NYPL.TC.

4. Helen Lohman, MS. NYPL.TC.

5. J.B. Atkinson, New York Times, February 2, 1933. Clipping, NYPL.TC. Paul Cooper estimates \$10,000, in 'Eva Le Gallienne's Civic Repertory Theatre', Diss. University of Illinois 1967, p.255.

was an average operating loss each season of \$115,000.<sup>1</sup>

One of the members of the company recalled how difficult it was to find the balance: Le Gallienne often had 'to go out after rehearsals and get money for our immediate needs'.<sup>2</sup> Some additional income was derived from the Civic Repertory Theatre Club, but the amount dwindled over the seasons from a maximum of about \$60,000 to \$4,000.<sup>3</sup> The theatre made use of alternative sources: selling its plays, publishing a magazine, even absorbing Le Gallienne's \$5,000 Pictorial Review prize for her contribution to the arts. \$2,000 was taken in through a public fund-raising campaign in 1932.<sup>4</sup> But most additional income came, as it had at the New Playwrights' Theatre, from private gifts. A scheme, similar to those used by the Washington Square Players, Theatre Guild and American Laboratory Theatre, aimed to attract large donations by offering Life Membership for \$100, the status of Patron for \$500 and the status of Founder for \$1,000.<sup>5</sup> By 1932 there were some seventy-seven Life Members, seven Patrons and thirty-two Founders (often the wives of wealthy businessmen or professionals). With banking connections were Otto Kahn and the

1. P. Cooper, 'Eva Le Gallienne's Civic Repertory Theatre', Diss. University of Illinois 1967, p.255. Other estimates vary from \$40,000 (E. Le Gallienne, With a Quiet Heart /New York, 1953/, pp.58ff.) to \$150,000 (New York Herald Tribune, January 19, 1933. Clipping, NYPL.TC.).
2. In I. Kraft, New York Herald Tribune, February 17, 1929. Clipping, /NYPL.TC
3. P. Cooper, 'Eva Le Gallienne's Civic Repertory Theatre', Diss. University of Illinois 1967, p.261.
4. S. Brown, Wall Street Journal, September 30, 1929. Clipping, NYPL.TC.
5. See Civic Repertory Theatre Programmes, 1928-29. NYPL.TC.

wife of Felix Warburg; with business connections, Adolph Lewisohn and John D. Rockefeller Jr. and the wives of Simon and Solomon Guggenheim and Edward S. Harkness; there was the wife of the conductor, Leopold Stokowski; and the wife of the editor, Edward Bok.<sup>1</sup> Members of this group almost certainly contributed most of the \$690,000 of total additional revenue which the theatre absorbed.<sup>2</sup>

The fluctuating availability of these contributions was the major weakness in the Civic Repertory's funding system, as it was for all those Art Theatres which relied on support from private sources. In 1931 the theatre faced such difficulties that it suspended production for the season. When it reopened in 1932 the general economic Depression, which was also seriously weakening the Laboratory, the Provincetown and the Guild, was depriving many of the theatre's patrons of their ability to help. For one more season the Civic Repertory struggled on while their Business Manager 'practically held up various still wealthy patrons at the point of a gun'.<sup>3</sup> Then in 1933 another crisis overwhelmed the theatre. Having tried the expedient of contraction in 1931, the Civic Repertory now introduced a new measure to save itself: expansion to increase income. (The Neighborhood Playhouse had discussed the same idea in 1927 when it was suggested that the organization transfer to a theatre

1. Ibid.

2. P. Cooper, 'Eva Le Gallienne's Civic Repertory Theatre', Diss. University of Illinois 1967, p.255.

3. E. Le Gallienne, With a Quiet Heart (New York, 1953), p.58.



closer to the commercial theatre district.)<sup>1</sup> At the Civic Repertory, the move to the New Amsterdam met with no success. Income still fell far short of expenditure. Le Gallienne tried to keep her company together on tour through 1933-34, but simply added a further \$75,000 to her liabilities.<sup>2</sup> She was forced to admit defeat: 'I had no contacts with any new money'.<sup>3</sup>

The Depression ruined the American Laboratory Theatre as it had the Civic Repertory because the Laboratory too depended on private patronage. As it expanded through the later 1920s to improve its artistic standards, it faced the same widening gap between income and expenditure. In the first season, expenses added up to \$11,150, a modest figure but one which the sale of shares and tuition fees just failed to match by some \$1,550.<sup>4</sup> In the first season of public productions, the deficit was \$3,860. By 1930, it was over \$10,000.

As well as raising the cost of tuition fees<sup>5</sup> the Laboratory introduced subscription charges, sublet the theatre to outside groups,

1. See above, Chapter VII, p.261.

2. P. Cooper, 'Eva Le Gallienne and Her Civic Repertory Theatre', Diss. University of Illinois 1967, p.23.

3. E. Le Gallienne, With a Quiet Heart (New York, 1953), p.73.

4. R. Willis, 'The American Laboratory Theatre: 1923-1930', Diss. University of Iowa 1968, pp.76-77.

5. They were \$700 for a full course in 1927-28. 'The Dramatic School Department', Leaflet, 1927. NYPL.TC.

rented out scenery and costumes and offered lectures and concerts. An unusual step was to 'tax' active members of the organization. All Art Theatres relied heavily on support from active members, which sometimes included cash contributions as well as their giving freely of their labour, but only the Laboratory tried to systematize contributions as a kind of tax. New pupils were to pay a fixed sum of \$10.00 per week into a sinking fund. If they stayed with the group as graduates, they paid 10% of their salary and received a share of stock when their contributions totalled \$100.<sup>1</sup>

The greatest proportion of additional revenue, however, came from private patrons. Like the Civic Repertory, the American Laboratory Theatre designed an elaborate scheme to attract donors. It cost donors rather more to become associated with the Laboratory because,

since the Laboratory had limited general appeal, it was felt that the best chances for success depended on approaching small numbers of people for sizeable contributions rather than attempting to enlist popular support from minor contributors.<sup>2</sup>

Here the patron could purchase a Memorial (an inscribed theatre seat) for \$500, a Memorial Scholarship for one year for \$1,000, a place on the Honor Roll of the Acting Company for \$2,500, a place on the Repertory Honor Roll, making one show possible, for \$5,000 and, for \$10,000, the status of Founder, honoured by a permanent bronze plaque.<sup>3</sup> The group hoped such a scheme would raise \$300,000, securing the

1. R. Willis, 'The American Laboratory Theatre: 1923-1930', Diss. University of Iowa 1968, p.45.

2. *Ibid*, pp.192-93.

3. 'The American Laboratory Theatre', Catalogue, 1927. NYPL.TC.

theatre for about six years and helping it on its way towards a 'take-off' point when, like the Theatre Guild, it could become independent. The result was disappointing. It brought in little more than \$10,000.<sup>1</sup>

Fund-raising was more successful in many ways on an ad hoc basis. There were charity suppers and informal contacts with wealthy sympathisers. Some prominent patrons were active members of the group. There was Mrs. Edgar Levy, who underwrote expenses to keep the group together in the summer of 1924; Mrs. Herbert Stockton, who mortgaged her home to meet the rent of the La Salle premises in 1925; and the wealthy social worker Mrs. Stanley McCormick, who donated \$10,000 in 1924-25, \$14,000 in 1926-27 and, with her associates in Chicago, \$85,000 in 1927. Support also came from John D. Rockefeller Jr. and Mrs. Leopold Stokowski, both of whom were simultaneously helping the Civic Repertory, and also from the banker George F. Baker Jr.<sup>2</sup> On at least two occasions the group approached Otto Kahn, but without success.

When money could not be found, the Laboratory economized radically. In 1928 the theatre closed for a full season. In 1930, it unsuccessfully sought cheap facilities from the Civic Repertory Theatre and from local colleges to continue its work.<sup>3</sup> Then it

1. R. Willis, 'The American Laboratory Theatre: 1923-1930', Diss. University of Iowa 1968, p.195.
2. See American Laboratory Theatre Programmes, 1924-30. NYPL.TC.
3. See R. Willis, 'The American Laboratory Theatre, 1923-1930', Diss. University of Iowa 1968, p.264.



closed permanently in 1930 with debts of over \$10,000, a sum which the Depression magnified beyond any hope of redemption.

Dependence on subsidy from a limited source or from private sources in general was a weakness common to the foundation of the five theatres whose economic problems I have so far described.<sup>1</sup> In practice, as their problems worsened, there was a noticeable shift towards broadening out their economic bases. They sought to increase the number of their patrons and, in the case of the Neighborhood Playhouse and American Laboratory Theatre, to introduce audience subscription systems. Those theatres which were founded with such advantage generally faced better prospects and prolonged their activities with better success. Having said this, however, it is to the economic problems of such theatres that I wish to draw attention; and these they had in full measure. In time, these theatres too broadened their economic bases, in their case towards patronage to supplement their income. The New Theatre, for example, was to turn to its patrons for much more help than ever it anticipated.

The founder of the New Theatre budgeted the first year's expenses at \$750,705.08.<sup>2</sup> They actually spent \$901,687.54.<sup>3</sup> This was a

1. See above, Chapter IV, p.151.

2. See above, Chapter IV, p.134.

3. Storage premises \$10,000. Directors' salaries \$42,000. Production costs \$140,541.31. Insurance, interest on loans, rehearsal salaries, tax \$207,526.78. Running costs, house expenses \$501,619.36. J.H. Jennings, 'A History of the New Theatre in New York', Diss. Stanford University 1953, p.179.

considerable investment, even compared to commercial theatre scales. Whereas few of the Art Theatres spent more than \$20,000 on any one production, the New Theatre laid out as much as \$41,309.35 on the exceptional Antony and Cleopatra.<sup>1</sup> Cast salaries averaged \$100 per week each.<sup>2</sup> In balance the box-office grossed only \$324,655.17.<sup>3</sup>

To offset an alarming deficit, the New Theatre developed the usual additional sources of income. There were concessionary businesses in the theatre foyer, the sale of New Theatre plays and public lectures. And there was a cut in cast salaries and production expenses. At the same time the theatre began to do better at the box-office. The income for 1910-11 was up to \$454,083.10.<sup>4</sup> Some of the Founders, Otto Kahn among them, were optimistic that the theatre could soon become self-supporting. For the rest, the burden of press criticism and having to meet a \$642,500 deficit over two seasons proved insupportable.<sup>5</sup>

In contrast the Washington Square Players enjoyed a promising

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1. Ibid, pp.111 and 148ff.

2. 'Report of the Executive Committee to the Founders', Leaflet, January, 1909. NYPL.TC.

3. J.H. Jennings, 'A History of the New Theatre in New York', Diss. Stanford University 1953, p.229.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid, p.211.

start.<sup>1</sup> The Players had very modest expenses to meet. Salaries, if paid at all during the first half season, were paid only to one or two activists. Production costs could be extremely low: the designs for Interior, for example, cost a mere \$35.00.<sup>2</sup> At the Bandbox Theatre, the Players paid their way.

It was when the Players started to follow the Playhouse and Laboratory Theatre pattern and began to expand their organization to improve their artistic standards that problems began to undermine their stability. From the Bandbox, with its rental of \$8,000 for the season, they moved to the Comedy, for which they were charged \$32,000. They began to pay activists up to \$25 per week. Production costs rose, and there was rental to meet on a separate block of offices across the street.<sup>3</sup> Against their rising costs, the Players undertook to supplement their income: by raising prices, public lectures, tuition in theatre arts, subletting their theatre, manufacturing costumes for other theatres and advertising their plays on a royalty basis to amateur theatre groups throughout the United States.<sup>4</sup> But their increased income failed to match expenses, a difficulty born out by a number of letters in the Players' office

1. I have been able to locate too little information concerning the experience of the Jewish Art Theatre to make any legitimate observations here. There are many details to be gleaned from clippings and programmes on file at the NYPL.TC. and Yivo Institute, New York, but they give a disconnected account of developments.

2. W.P. Eaton, The Theatre Guild: The First Ten Years (New York, 1929), /p.24.

3. Ibid.

4. 'The Washington Square Players', Leaflet. NYPL.TC.



files. In 1917, for example, a letter from a professional seamstress, to whom the Players had taken some work, complained that her bill was still unpaid.<sup>1</sup> From within the organization there was pressure for higher wages: a playreader wrote to beg for a raise to \$10 for her thirty hours' work each week.<sup>2</sup> And from Chicago, Lawrence Langner wrote to the committee in New York with an idea to help clear their debts, having discovered an interest in a Players' play, Aglavaine and Selysette. A company of the Players was on tour so, he suggested, since

we do want the cash, why on earth can't we give our own special production of Aglavaine and Selysette - should boost income \$500 per week without extra cost ... A few weeks at \$5,000 will pull us out of any deficit.<sup>3</sup>

When the Players disbanded in 1918, they left a 'substantial debt'.<sup>4</sup>

In their last two seasons, most of their supplementary income was to come from private patrons. Whereas theatres like the Neighborhood Playhouse and the American Laboratory Theatre attempted to broaden their economic base from patronage to box-office and subscriptions, the Players extended their interests to patronage. As early as October 1915 they introduced a patronage system to enable sympathisers to purchase Sustaining Memberships at \$100.<sup>5</sup> Prominent

1. Letter from M. Brown to the Washington Square Players, May 9, 1917. NYPL.TC.
2. Letter from 'Jo' to Edward Goodman. NYPL.TC.
3. Letter to Edward Goodman. NYPL.TC.
4. L. Langner, The Magic Curtain (New York, 1952), p.100.
5. 'The Washington Square Players, Announcement', Leaflet, October 4, 1915. NYPL.TC.

patrons mentioned in connection with the Players include the ubiquitous Otto Kahn, Rita and Max Morgenthau, Jr., who were active in managing the Neighborhood Playhouse, the wife of the capitalist Adolph Lewisohn, and the wife of the lawyer Sam Untermyer.<sup>1</sup> How much help came from sympathizers outside the Players themselves remains obscure. It is certain that Otto Kahn had begun to make contributions of several thousand dollars as early as 1915-16, some of which was repaid. In 1916 he gave \$10,000, in 1917 \$1,250.

Between 1909 and 1932, the Art Theatres derived unquestionable benefit from Otto Kahn above all other patrons. One of the age's greatest philanthropists, his generosity is commemorated to this day at New York's newest Metropolitan Opera House at Lincoln Center: for his theatrical interests concerned almost the entire world of theatre arts. There was a great gulf between the Cherry Lane Theatre of the New Playwrights and the Met. but Kahn's interest and generosity spanned it. The Art Theatres would have existed without his generosity, but their history might have been different. This 'frustrated artist',<sup>3</sup> as Michael Gold described him, vitally helped

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1. See letters from 'B.R.H.' to Edward Goodman, June 3, 1914; and 'Jo' to Edward Goodman. NYPL.TC.
  2. M. Matz, The Many Lives of Otto Kahn (New York, 1963), pp. 132-134.
  3. Ibid., p.139.

the New Playwrights, the Civic Repertory, the New Theatre, the Washington Square Players, the Theatre Guild and the Provincetown. In no theatre did he constantly attempt to influence the management in their policy-making. His critics could only say of him that he gave too little.<sup>1</sup> Admittedly, it could be argued that his generosity was not entirely beneficial to those theatres which became too dependent upon his fortunes. But his great contribution was, unarguably, his assistance for theatres in their early days. As I have shown, for example, he gave the Guild its first opportunity.<sup>2</sup> As soon as the Guild had established itself, it had no need of permanent patrons and asked for none. It continued the course of expansion of its predecessor, the Washington Square Players, from modest beginnings in 1919 until it became the centre of a theatrical empire extending across the United States. The Guild was not immune to financial crisis. With receipts occasionally as low as \$25.00 per night, the first play lost an average of \$500 per week, met in part by Lawrence Langner at some self-sacrifice.<sup>3</sup> After Power of Darkness in 1920, the Guild was \$100 in the red.<sup>4</sup> And again, before

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1. See letter from Arthur Carns to Otto Kahn, December 9, 1929, in W. Vilhauer, 'A History and Evaluation of the Provincetown Players', Diss. University of Iowa 1965, p.576.
  2. See above, Chapter IV, p.144.
  3. L. Langner, The Magic Curtain (New York, 1952), p.119; and L. Langner, Boston Transcript, December 7, 1929. Clipping, NYPL.TC.
  4. W.P. Eaton, The Theatre Guild: The First Ten Years (New York, 1929), pp.43ff.



the period of greatest financial success in the mid 1920s, the organization ended the season 1923-24 with only £1,000 in assets.<sup>1</sup> But, with a fortuitous blend of extraordinarily successful plays and capable management, the Guild alone for many seasons harnessed the advantages of expansion, gained impetus from it and ultimately survived the ravages of the Depression. The management succeeded in realizing the maximum income by judiciously balancing the advantages to be gained both from economy and expansion. Determined to secure a measure of independence from 'angels' without unduly compromising its ideology, the Guild managed successful plays in larger theatres and on tour, raised prices, gave lectures, sublet its theatre, published a magazine and carefully looked after the considerable royalties its Shaw rights realized. As a sound economic base, the advance sales of subscriptions steadily kept pace with increased expenditure on the production side, rising to £600,000 in 1929-30.<sup>2</sup> When the Guild needed supplementary funds, as when the organization planned to build a new theatre, patrons were readily found. There were fund-raising suppers and special entertainments such as Freaks and Frolics of 1926 and the leading philanthropists of the theatre world contributed directly. Many of them, like Otto Kahn, Edward Harkness, Mr. and Mrs. Max Morgenthau and Mrs. Willard Straight<sup>3</sup> were associated with other Art Theatres.

Throughout the 1920s, the Guild made such spectacular advances

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1. Ibid, p.81.

2. See A. Woolcott, New York Times, September 17, 1922. Clipping, NYPL.TC.

3. See New York Times, April 30, 1923. Clipping, NYPL.TC.

that some critics deprecated its progress as mere commercialism.<sup>1</sup> But as I have shown and as the Guild itself argued, notably experimental and non-commercial plays appeared alongside the minority which were relatively 'safe'.<sup>2</sup> With the Depression, even the Guild's strong position gave way to the uncertainty which had threatened its earliest years. In 1929-30 'the Guild was having its own financial crisis to parallel that of Wall Street'. Its losses reached \$180,000.<sup>3</sup> Subsequently, it survived only by transforming and commercializing its ideology to an extent which no other Art Theatre in similar circumstances either would or could do. Effectively the Guild ceased to be an Art Theatre.

The Guild succeeded in increasing income to keep pace with expansion to a degree which no other Art Theatre matched. Whereas the Guild capitalized on the advantages to be gained from expansion in favourable circumstances, when exceptional artistic successes were to hand, when the plays themselves demanded a wider audience, the Provincetown, like the Civic Repertory Theatre, generally turned to expansion from a position of weakness to resolve financial problems which only a wider audience could achieve. The Provincetown, like many Art Theatres, did not always succeed in making the most of

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1. E.g. 'Debunking the Theatre Guild', New York Review, April 14, 1928.

2. See above, Chapter IX, p.354.

3. L. Langner, The Magic Curtain (New York, 1952), p.246.

its successes and did not develop a management either so gifted or so sensitive to financial problems. With good management it is almost certain that the Provincetown could have established a security as sound as the Guild's. As an actor with the group, Walter Abel observed,

There was lack of maturity all round. We could have been in the same position as the Theatre Guild. Only we didn't have Lawrence Langner and Maurice Wertheim .... or Theresa Helburn.<sup>1</sup>

It was the fortune of the Provincetown to develop such a management only in 1929, at a time when the commercial theatre, no less than the Art Theatres, began to show signs of general economic difficulty.

The Provincetown began modestly. Most activists were amateurs, they found their own costumes, they paid very little rent and they spent only what their income allowed on production. The Emperor Jones in 1920 seems to have been considered expensive: it was produced for \$502.38.<sup>2</sup> But between 1916 and 1929, the pursuit of artistic standards brought in salaried staff and actors: the total salary bill in 1918-19 was \$3,507.06, in 1929 it was over \$100,000.<sup>3</sup> And production costs, for example, rose from the level of \$432.72 for a full season in 1918-19, to a budgeted \$10,000 per production

1. In W. Vilhauer, 'A History and Evaluation of the Provincetown Players', Diss. University of Iowa 1965, p.481.
2. H. Deutsch and S. Hanau, The Provincetown: A Story of the Theatre (1931; rpt. New York, 1959), pp.65ff.
3. 'Statement of Receipts and Disbursements of Provincetown Players for Season 1918-1919', TS, 1919; and 'Budget of Estimated Expenses', TS, 1929. NYPL.TC.



in 1929.<sup>1</sup> Expenditure as a whole increased from \$7,666.54 in 1918-19 to a projected \$231,740.<sup>2</sup>

Throughout this period, the Provincetown had the utmost difficulty in preserving its solvency. In 1920, its investment of \$360 in a kuppelhorizonte exhausted all its reserves.<sup>3</sup> Two years later Edna Kenton described how desperate the situation was: the rent was unpaid, the clippings bureau to which the theatre subscribed refused to do further business, the telephone was cut off and there was only \$8.00 in the bank.<sup>4</sup> In 1928 there were insufficient funds to produce Cumming's Him<sup>5</sup> and in 1929 Eleanor Fitzgerald appealed for assistance: 'If the Provincetown is to continue its work, we must have immediate help ... to cover rent and unpaid salaries'.<sup>6</sup>

To meet their expenses, the members of the Provincetown did the best they could while maintaining their standards and preserving the body of their ideology intact. They raised their prices, sublet their theatre and earned royalties on plays for which they held rights. In emergency, they contracted their activities to the

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

3. See H. Deutsch and S. Hanau, The Provincetown: A Story of the Theatre (1931; rpt. New York, 1959), p.61.

4. Letter to Susan (Glaspell) Cook, June 19, 1922. H.TC.

5. See Letter from the Provincetown to Mrs. W.H. Vanderbilt, March 15, 1928. NYPL.TC.

6. Letter to Evelyn Johnson, November 20, 1929. NYPL.TC.

point of suspending all work for a full season. And, like the Players, they turned increasingly to private patronage, eventually becoming as dependent on this supplementary income as were the Neighborhood Playhouse or the Little Theatre. As well as forming fund-raising clubs, like the Greenwich Village Club in 1924, they directly solicited support for specific plays as in the case of Him and O'Neill's Lazarus Laughed.<sup>1</sup> Their general appeals became more frequent and for larger sums of money: in 1924 they asked for \$20,000 to secure the Greenwich Village Theatre, in 1926 it was \$50,000 and in 1929 \$100,000.<sup>2</sup> But the greater part of their needs was met for some time by individual patrons making relatively large contributions. Most prominent among them were Otto Kahn, Mrs. Willard Straight and Mr. and Mrs. Max Morgenthau, (all of whom were assisting other Art Theatres), Evelyn Johnson (possibly the wife of Charles Henry Johnson, director of State Charities) and Mrs. W.H. Vanderbilt, who was daughter-in-law of the capitalist Frederick William Vanderbilt.<sup>3</sup> In 1929 the Provincetown closed in the face of mounting debts and diminishing support.<sup>4</sup>

Fundamental non-commercialism was therefore an actuality shared

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1. Unsuccessfully in the case of Lazarus Laughed. Cf. financing for Rapid Transit by Horace Liveright, in New York Sun, April 7, 1927. Clipping, NYPL.TC.
  2. February 25, 1924 (and see New York Tribune, April 27, 1924); Saturday Theatre Review, June 26, 1926; and TS, October, 1929. Clippings, NYPL.TC.
  3. See Provincetown Programmes, 1928-29 etc. NYPL.TC.; and 'Contributors 1929-30 Season', TS, 1929. NYPL.TC.
  4. New York World, December 16, 1929. Clipping, NYPL.TC.

by all the Art Theatres as they developed their ideals. Scarcely anywhere was there the opportunity for profit taking. In general terms, each theatre sought to improve its weak economic position by economizing in certain areas, by expanding in others and by broadening its financial base through the exploitation of alternative sources of revenue (as well as by modifying its ideals). As their economic positions worsened, they relied increasingly on private patronage to meet their deficits, becoming more vulnerable in proportion as they depended on the yield of sources over which they had no control. The Little Theatre, the Neighborhood Playhouse, the New Theatre, the Jewish Art Theatre and the Washington Square Players collapsed under financial stress. And the Depression ruined the ideals of the New Playwrights' Theatre, the Civic Repertory Theatre, the American Laboratory Theatre, the Theatre Guild and the Provincetown.

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## CHAPTER XI

### THE ART THEATRE MOVEMENT

There is no antagonism between our kind of theatre and the commercial theatre. They are simply and definitely two separate things. As everyone knows.

Eleanor Fitzgerald, 'Valedictory of an Art Theatre', New York Times, December 22, 1929.

In the course of comparing and examining the ideals of the Art Theatres, a number of connecting links between individual theatres has naturally emerged, beyond the existence of a shared corpus of ideology. I might, for example, recall that Winthrop Ames resigned from the New Theatre to found the Little Theatre. The Little Theatre was discussed by the members of the Neighborhood Playhouse as a possible future home. Several actors at the Playhouse went for lessons to Richard Boleslavsky, soon to found the American Laboratory Theatre. The Laboratory was associated with the premises at 139, Macdougall Street, along with the Provincetown and Washington Square Players; it exchanged ideas with the Provincetown and supplied it with personnel; it supplied costumes to the New Playwrights' Theatre; and it made contact with the Civic Repertory Theatre, offering to train Civic Repertory actors. The Civic Repertory took personnel from the Jewish Art Theatre. The Jewish Art Theatre was reviewed by Kenneth Macgowan, soon to take over from George Cram Cook at the Provincetown. The Provincetown, which may have given the name of its theatre to the New Playwright's Theatre, sprang from the same roots as the Washington Square Players, who went on to become the Theatre Guild.

While these connections, on so many different levels, could be explained in terms of a natural relationship enjoyed by any theatre organizations within one city at roughly the same time, I would like to suggest that the relationship between the Art Theatres was a special one and went far deeper than this. Not only did the Art

Theatres possess a common ideology and experience which created a strong spiritual bond between them: they positively regarded themselves as forming a special group and were often considered as such by many contemporary critics. They 'shared' an extraordinary number of people: actors, theatre staff, writers and patrons. They had many points of direct contact, even to the point of formal organization. The Art Theatres, in fact, combined to form a coherent movement and it is this aspect of their work to which I would like, finally, to draw attention.

A number of critics regularly reviewed the work of the Art Theatres. Most prominent among them were J. Brooks Atkinson of the Times, Heywood Broun of the World, John Mason Brown of the Post, Louis V. De Foe of the World, Gilbert Gabriel of the Times, Percy Hammond of the Herald Tribune, H.T. Parker of the Boston Transcript, Stephen Rathbun of the Sun and Alexander Woollcott of the World and the Times.<sup>1</sup> Generally they mixed freely with the members of the Art Theatres, sometimes taking an active part in their works (J.M. Brown, for example, was associated with the Laboratory). In reviews they often discussed the work of one theatre in relation to other theatres in the group. Hammond discussed the Civic Repertory and Theatre Guild; and H.T. Parker the Civic Repertory and Neighborhood Playhouse.<sup>2</sup> Louis V. De Foe drew together the

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1. Few critics devoted their services to a single newspaper or magazine.

2. 'The Theatres', New York Herald Tribune, October 14, 1928; and Literary Digest (December 11, 1926). Clipping, NYPL.TC.



Washington Square Players, the Little Theatre and the Provincetown to consider the 'intimate theatre movement'.<sup>1</sup> Other critics saw further connections. Oliver Sayler linked the Theatre Guild and the Provincetown as 'independent groups'; Arthur Hobson Quinn as 'repertoire theatres' along with the Little Theatre.<sup>2</sup> For Tracy Lewis, the Playhouse, the Provincetown and the Guild were organizations 'with a purpose'; for Gregory Zilboorg they were the kind of theatres sorely missed outside New York; and for Lawrence Reamer, along with the Washington Square Players, they were the 'little theatres'.<sup>3</sup> And the collective impact of the Playhouse, Players and Provincetown was noted by Joseph Wood Krutch:

Whatever changes for the better have taken place ... in the condition of the New York stage have been for the most part traceable directly or indirectly to the influence of those three organizations.<sup>4</sup>

While the Theatre Arts Magazine under the editorship of Edith Isaacs frequently reported on the activities of the Art Theatres individually and handled a good deal of their advertising, there appeared for a short time a weekly publication called We Present!, subtitled A Weekly Survey of the Little Theatre in New York, which had as its focus the Art Theatres, reporting on the work of the Jewish Art Theatre, the Provincetown, the Guild and the

1. New York World, November 10, 1918. Clipping, NYPL.TC.
2. 'The New Movement in the Theatre', North American Review (June, 1921), pp.761ff.; and 'Now My Idea Is This', Philadelphia Evening Public Ledger, March 30, 1922.
3. 'Intellectual Groups Are Now Provided for', February 27, 1921. Clipping, NYPL.TC.; 'The Intelligentsia and the Street', Drama (May, 1921), p.276; and 'Increase of Little Theatres Changes the Playgoers' Map', New York Herald, March 12, 1922.
4. 'Vale', in Neighborhood Playhouse Programme for The Grand Street Follies, May 19, 1927. NYPL.TC.

Neighborhood Playhouse. At least four issues appeared from October 18, 1919, two of which still survive in the Theatre Collection of the New York Public Library.

A very few contemporary printed books discussed some of these theatres collectively in general considerations of American theatre. The Little Theatre, Provincetown, Washington Square Players and Neighborhood Playhouse are mentioned in Constance D'Arcy MacKay's The Little Theatre in the United States; the Little Theatre, the Provincetown, the Players, the Playhouse and the New Theatre in T.H. Dickinson's The Insurgent Theatre; almost all the Art Theatres in Kenneth Macgowan's Footlights Across America and Irma Kraft's Plays, Players, Playhouses; and the Provincetown, the Players, the Playhouse, the New Theatre and the Guild in Sheldon Cheney's The Art Theatre.<sup>1</sup>

If critics knew in general terms of some of the underlying connections between some of the Art Theatres, the members of the organizations themselves were rather more aware. For evidence of this, it is possible to point to many instances of contemporary discussion of the work of one Art Theatre by a leading figure in another. The Laboratory's ephemeral publication The Pit discussed the theatre's work with reference to the Provincetown and the New Playwrights.<sup>2</sup> And it was Boleslavsky who suggested that perhaps America's first Art Theatre was the New Theatre.<sup>3</sup> John Dos Passos

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1. Works all cited in the Bibliography.

2. April, 1928. Museum of the City of New York.

3. 'The American Laboratory Theatre', Catalogue, 1928. NYPL.TC.

at the New Playwrights' Theatre talked of the Theatre Guild and Civic Repertory Theatre; and J.H. Lawson discussed the work of the Provincetown, the Players and the Playhouse.<sup>1</sup> At the Neighborhood Playhouse, Alice Lewisohn compared the theatre to the Provincetown and the Players.<sup>2</sup> Kenneth Macgowan, soon to be associated with the Provincetown, reviewed the work of the Jewish Art Theatre and the Theatre Guild; and David Carbof the Provincetown reviewed the Civic Repertory Theatre in the pages of the Theatre Guild magazine.<sup>3</sup> Eleanor Fitzgerald described the Provincetown, the Guild, and Playhouse as 'having common cause'.<sup>4</sup> At the Civic Repertory, Le Gallienne recognized the 'splendid' work of the Guild.<sup>5</sup> At the Guild, Lawrence Langner discussed the work of the Provincetown and the Players.<sup>6</sup> And Edward Goodman was reviewing the work of the New Theatre at the time he was about to take up the administration of the Washington Square Players.<sup>7</sup>

I would like in addition to mention some of the many observations on this subject which prominent members of the Art Theatres have made to me personally. As I intimated in the Preface

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1. The New Republic (April 1, 1931), p.171; in G. Knox and H. Stahl, Dos Passos and the Revolting Playwrights (Uppsala, 1964), p.47; and see New York Sun, February 2, 1927. Clippings, NYPL.TC.
  2. The Neighborhood Playhouse: Leaves from a Theatre Scrapbook (New York, 1959), p.102.
  3. New York Globe, December 21, 1921; 'Seen on Stage' (1924). Clipping, H.TC.; and February, 1931, pp.36-37.
  4. New York Evening Post, November 16, 1925. Clipping, NYPL.TC.
  5. In P. Cooper, 'Eva Le Gallienne's Civic Repertory Theatre', Diss. University of Illinois 1967, pp.36-37.
  6. The Magic Curtain (New York, 1952), p.229.
  7. 'The Endowed Theatre', Forum (January, 1910).



I have not already referred to this full and fertile source of information because, although it has formed an influential background to everything that has gone before, I have found it to be both intensely subjective and abounding with false or inaccurate statements on every matter, which the passing of some fifty years has done nothing to reconcile. But their recollections may be to the point here. The playwright Thornton Wilder, who was associated with the American Laboratory Theatre from 1924 to 1929, knew of all the Art Theatres in the group while he was there:

I ... was indeed then (and in the following years) very well aware of [their] theatrical activities.<sup>1</sup>

Of the same period his colleague Francis Fergusson, actor and director, remembered that

some of the actors of the following theatres worked briefly with us: the Civic Repertory Theatre, the Jewish Art Theatre, the Neighborhood Playhouse, the Theatre Guild .... Many of us knew Eva Le Gallienne and Nazimova who acted with her.<sup>2</sup>

Richard Aldrich, Business Manager of the theatre, wrote that he

knew Eva Le Gallienne and her Civic Repertory Company ... also knew all about the Neighborhood Playhouse and the Provincetown Playhouse .... The Theatre Guild - I knew them all and watched their work.<sup>3</sup>

He claimed to be a 'close friend' of the designer Donald Oenslager who worked briefly with the Neighborhood Playhouse. At the Guild Theatre, to which Laboratory members like Aldrich would go, there was the actor Morris Carnovsky, later prominent at the Group Theatre.

1. Letter to the author, April 1, 1974.

2. Letter to the author, February 24, 1974.

3. Letter to the Author, March 5, 1974.

He was in close contact with the Laboratory, as he says, 'through Harold Clurman, Lee Strasberg and Stella Adler'. To the Laboratory he attributed the Guild's acquaintance 'with the Stanislavski System'. Carnovsky knew several of Le Gallienne's company and well remembered visiting the Jewish Art Theatre for its 'enviable example'. At the same time he followed the progress of the Neighborhood Playhouse and the Provincetown.<sup>1</sup> The Guild designer Mordecai Gorelik has told me that he too was 'certainly aware' of all our Art Theatres and he himself actively associated with the New Playwrights' Theatre and the Provincetown.<sup>2</sup> Two people Gorelik may have encountered in Macdougall Street were the playwrights Samson Raphaelson and Paul Green. Raphaelson's personal friends at this time included Eva Le Gallienne, John Dos Passos, Michael Gold, Em Jo Basshe, John Howard Lawson, Francis Faragoh, Theresa Helburn and Lawrence Langner - members of the Civic Repertory, New Playwrights' Theatre and Guild. Green at the same time remembers that he was 'keenly aware of and encouraged by the American Laboratory Theatre, Civic Repertory and .... Theatre Guild', where he was well acquainted with Theresa Helburn, Philip Moeller, Lawrence Langner and others.<sup>3</sup> Eva Le Gallienne herself, as will have become evident,

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1. Letter to the author, August 22, 1974.

2. Letter to the author, March 6, 1974.

3. Letter to the author, May 24, 1974.

was 'of course' familiar with the work of all the Art Theatres going on around her.<sup>1</sup>

These links and personal contacts, so well developed over a relatively short period of time, were sufficiently strong in comparison to those extending across commercial organizations and between commercial and Art Theatre organizations to give the Art Theatres a positive group identity. The suggestion becomes more convincing when we look for example at some other people who had very close contacts with more than one Art Theatre or who moved from one theatre to another.

Commonly held artistic ideals were often rooted in common environments. The most obviously fecund environment in this regard was Greenwich Village. Here the Washington Square Players, later the Theatre Guild, and the Provincetown drew most of their active members at about the same period, from a community which was unusually well acquainted with itself. Before the First World War, the Village had a certain renown as an alternative community for anyone, male or female, who felt the need to define some sort of distinction between his or her own views and those of family, neighbourhood or society.<sup>2</sup> In the period immediately before the War the community as a whole was moving towards a greater radicalism

1. Letter to the author, May 23, 1974.

2. See S. Glaspell, The Road to the Temple (New York, 1927), p.235.



of outlook, transcending the 'leisure class idealism' of the 1910s. By 1919 there were more coherent ideas: an ideal of childlike innocence, opposed to cynicism and calculating self-interest; a pagan awareness of physical beauty and the inherent purity of physical love; an emphasis on living for the present rather than for accumulating security for the future; a belief in moral and economic female equality; and an exaltation of personal freedom to express the self creatively. For some, the Village was still not providing the right environment: all that remained was for them to 'take ship for Europe, where people know how to live'.<sup>1</sup> For the rest, there was involvement in a number of Village-centred activities. The Liberal Club was a popular 'meeting place for those interested in new ideas', as it described itself, and here many of those who were later to form the Provincetown, Players and Guild met and came to know each other. Next door to the club was the Washington Square Bookshop which brought others into the group. Their friendships persisted after the Provincetown, the Players and later the Guild groups had crystallized and several members of this coterie were actively associated with more than one group, and with more than the Village-based theatres. A very selective list of specific people makes this clear:

Edward Ballantine:	Little Theatre, Provincetown, Washington Square Players.
Albert and Charles Boni:	Provincetown, Washington Square Players.
George Cram Cook:	Provincetown, Washington Square Players.
Floyd Dell:	Provincetown, Washington Square Players.

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1. M. Cowley, Exiles Return (London, 1934), p.79. See also A.Kreymborg, Troubadour (New York, 1925), p.207.

Theodore Dreiser:	Provincetown, Washington Square Players.
Susan Glaspell:	Civic Repertory Theatre, Neighborhood Playhouse, Provincetown, Washington Square Players.
Robert Edmund Jones:	American Laboratory Theatre, Neighborhood Playhouse, Provincetown, Washington Square Players.
Lawrence Langner:	American Laboratory Theatre, Provincetown, Theatre Guild, Washington Square Players.
Edna St. Vincent Millay:	Provincetown, Theatre Guild, Washington Square Players.
Ida Rauh:	Provincetown, Theatre Guild, Washington Square Players.
John Reed:	Provincetown, Washington Square Players.
Helen Westley:	Theatre Guild, Washington Square Players.

At other meeting places outside the Village more relationships were forged by future members of these groups. From the Socialist Press Club and the 291 Club for example came

Edward Goodman:	Washington Square Players.
Alfred Kreyborg:	Provincetown.
Philip Moeller:	Theatre Guild, Washington Square Players.

While the Provincetown, Players and Guild were strongly linked through the Village, many more Art Theatres were linked in a similar way through activities not in New York City at all but in the classes of Professor George Pierce Baker in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Graduates from these formal classes on playwriting and many different aspects of production went into almost every Art Theatre. Not always contemporary students, they took with them a common experience. Among them were Robert Edmund Jones and

Winthrop Ames:	Little Theatre, New Theatre.
Lewis Beach:	Provincetown, Washington Square Players.
Ruth Churpenning:	New Playwrights' Theatre, Provincetown, Washington Square Players.
Sam Eliot, Jr.:	Provincetown, Washington Square Players.
Theresa Helburn:	Theatre Guild, Washington Square Players.
Eleanor Hinkley:	Civic Repertory Theatre.
Edward Knoblauch:	New Theatre

Agnes Morgan:	Neighborhood Playhouse.
Mary Morris:	Civic Repertory Theatre, Provincetown, Washington Square Players.
Eugene O'Neill:	Neighborhood Playhouse, Provincetown, Theatre Guild, Washington Square Players.
Lee Simonson:	Theatre Guild, Washington Square Players.

Still further afield, the literary fraternity of Chicago brought together George Cram Cook, Susan Glaspell and Floyd Dell (Provincetown, Washington Square Players).

A connecting milieu of another sort was the common Jewish background of a number of activists in at least four Art Theatres: the Jewish Art Theatre, the Washington Square Players, the Theatre Guild and the Neighborhood Playhouse. In a confused article in 1933, John Corbin discussed the possibility that the Players and Guild were influenced in some way by the dramas produced in the Art Theatres of the Lower East Side.<sup>1</sup> He suggested that Jewish characteristics common to these theatres, even so far apart, tended to make for the production of similar kinds of drama. To the extent that Corbin noticed similarities and considered the importance of Jewishness in explanation, his observations are interesting. But the Jewish 'character' was not so important as the Jewish milieu and its facility for communication of ideas. He did not explain for instance how the Guild differed in its artistic policy from the policy of the Shubert organization. In fact there were more tangible connections between the Jewish Art Theatre, Neighborhood Playhouse, Washington Square Players and Theatre Guild which Corbin

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1. 'Drama and the Jew', Scribner's Magazine (May, 1933), pp.295ff.



could have observed. Personnel moved between the organizations, a process which was almost certainly assisted by the Jewish milieu. Jacob Ben-Ami for example was associated with the Jewish Art Theatre, the Playhouse and the Guild; and Celia Adler and Emanuel Reicher moved between the Jewish Art Theatre and the Guild. The same organizations both produced plays by David Pinski.

From the New Theatre to the New Playwrights' Theatre therefore there is a notable movement of personnel between organizations, made easier by certain common points of contact. A great many more activists moved about within the general boundaries of the group of Art Theatres simply because the shared ideals and identity of the theatres reduced barriers between them. In addition to those individuals I have already mentioned, there were, for example, the actors:

Romney Brent:	New Playwrights' Theatre, Theatre Guild.
Albert Bruning:	New Theatre, Theatre Guild.
Grover Burgess:	American Laboratory Theatre, New Playwrights' Theatre, Provincetown.
Louis Calvert:	New Theatre, Theatre Guild, Washington Square Players.
Albert Carrol:	Neighborhood Playhouse, Theatre Guild.
Charles Ellis:	Civic Repertory Theatre, Provincetown, Theatre Guild.
Edith Frisbee:	New Playwrights' Theatre, Provincetown.
Robert Gordon:	American Laboratory Theatre, Civic Repertory Theatre.
Agnes McCarthy:	Civic Repertory Theatre, Little Theatre, Washington Square Players.
Maria Ouspenskaya:	American Laboratory Theatre, Provincetown.
Rollo Peters:	Provincetown, Theatre Guild, Washington Square Players.
Beverly Sitgreaves:	New Theatre, Provincetown, Washington Square Players.

A number of designers, even more notably, took advantage of the

## freedom of movement:

Hamilton Bell:	Little Theatre, New Theatre.
Aline Bernstein:	Civic Repertory Theatre, Neighborhood Playhouse, Theatre Guild.
Mordecai Gorelik:	New Playwrights' Theatre, Provincetown, Theatre Guild.
Cleon Throckmorton:	Civic Repertory Theatre, New Playwrights' Theatre, Provincetown.

And among the directors there was a similar pattern:

Richard Boleslavsky:	American Laboratory Theatre, Neighborhood Playhouse, Provincetown.
Augustin Duncan:	Neighborhood Playhouse, Theatre Guild.
Alice and Irene Lewisohn:	Neighborhood Playhouse, Theatre Guild.
George Platt:	Little Theatre, New Theatre.

At the same time, playwrights too moved freely, firmly linking the artistic policies of different theatres. Among those who were personally associated with their productions were

Em Jo Basshe:	New Playwrights' Theatre (2 plays), Provincetown (1 play).
Susan Glaspell:	Civic Repertory (2), Neighborhood Playhouse (1), Provincetown (11), Washington Square Players (3).
J.H. Lawson:	New Playwrights' Theatre (1), Theatre Guild (1).
Eugene O'Neill:	Neighborhood Playhouse (1), Provincetown (16), Theatre Guild (3), Washington Square Players (2).
David Pinski:	Jewish Art Theatre (1), Provincetown (2), Theatre Guild (1).
Elmer Rice:	Theatre Guild (1), Washington Square Players (1).

(The Art Theatres 'shared' a great many more European authors, notably Leonid Andreyev, Chekhov, John Galsworthy, Ibsen, Shaw, Arthur Schnitzler and Strindberg.)<sup>1</sup> While different Art Theatres

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1. See below, Appendix C.



produced a number of plays by the same authors, only eleven individual plays actually received production by more than one organization: another indication that the members of the Art Theatres were very familiar with the work of their colleagues and avoided duplicating their plays.<sup>1</sup>

Still more people went backwards and forwards between the theatres. The organizations often arranged public addresses by the same lecturers, like Jacques Copeau (the American Laboratory Theatre and the Washington Square Players) and William Phelps (the Neighborhood Playhouse and the Washington Square Players), who themselves must have acted as bridges between the theatres. More often, members of one organization would be invited to speak to members of another. Richard Boleslavsky of the American Laboratory Theatre, for example, spoke at the Neighborhood Playhouse; Robert Edmund Jones, largely associated with the Provincetown, spoke at the same theatre; and Winifred Katzin of the Theatre Guild talked to members of the Provincetown.

Patrons frequently supported more than one Art Theatre. They,

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1. The eleven plays were: Sholem Asch's With the Current (JAT, 1920; NP, 1916); Chekhov's The Seagull (CRT, 1929; WSP, 1916) and The Three Sisters (CRT, 1926; ALT, 1930); George Cram Cook and Susan Glaspell's Suppressed Desires (P, 1915; WSP, 1918); Susan Glaspell's Close the Book (WSP, 1918; P, 1917), Trifles (P, 1916; WSP, 1916) and The People (P, 1917; NP, 1917); Michael Gold's Fiesta (scheduled by the NPT, 1927; P, 1929); Serafin and Joaquin Quintero's A Sunny Morning (NP, 1917; CRT, 1930); Shakespeare's Twelfth Night (CRT, 1926; NT, 1910; ALT, 1924-25); and Leo Tolstoy's The Power of Darkness (JAT, 1920; TG, 1920).



like the artists, playwrights and lecturers, were often more widely involved with the groups. There were, for example,

Frank Crowninshield:	American Laboratory Theatre, Provincetown, Theatre Guild.
Edward Filene:	American Laboratory Theatre, Civic Repertory Theatre, Provincetown.
Otto Kahn:	Civic Repertory Theatre, New Playwrights' Theatre, New Theatre, Provincetown, Theatre Guild, Washington Square Players.
Mr. and Mrs. Max Morgenthau:	American Laboratory Theatre, Neighborhood Playhouse, Provincetown, Theatre Guild.
Mrs. Willard Straight:	Neighborhood Playhouse, Provincetown, Theatre Guild.
Maurice Wertheim:	American Laboratory Theatre, Provincetown, Theatre Guild.

Selecting from the above analysis, and adding some further examples, it is possible to depict a strongly related group of theatres. The table on page 402 shows some of the more freely moving individuals and the theatres with which they were associated.

The programmes of one theatre might advertize the work of others: the Laboratory advertized the Provincetown, the Civic Repertory advertized the Guild, the Playhouse advertized the Laboratory, the Provincetown advertized the Laboratory, the Playhouse, the Guild and the New Playwrights and so on. As a whole, the group generally publicized itself in the pages of the Theatre Arts Magazine. Theatres might use the same architect, as in the case of the Playhouse and the Little Theatre; and the same fund-raising agencies, as in the case of the Laboratory and the Guild, the Civic Repertory and the New Playwrights. And they might subscribe to each other's magazines, as the Provincetown to the New Playwrights; or

NT	LT	NP	WSP	PP	TG	JAT	ALT	CRT	NPT
Winthrop Ames	Exec.	Exec.							
Edward Ballantine	Actor		Actor	Actor	Dir.		Patron		
Jacob Ben-Ami		Prodr.		Actor	Actor	Exec.	Patron	Actor	
Aline Bernstein		Exec.		Actor	Desnr.			Desnr.	
Richard Boleslavsky		Dir.		Dir.			Exec.		
Remo Buffano			Actor	Actor	Actor		Guest	Desnr.	Patron
Louis Calbert	Actor		Actor		Actor		Pupil		Member
Harold Clurman					Dir.		Patron		
Augustin Duncan		Dir.		Actor	Actor			Actor	
Charles Ellis		Pwt.	Pwt.	Exec.	Dir.			Pwt.	
Susan Glaspell		P.R.	Pwt.	P.R.	P.R.			P.R.	P.R.
Stella Hanau			Pwt.	Exec.	Exec.			Patron	
Theresa Helburn		Desnr.	Desnr.	Exec.			Desnr.		
Robert Jones		Patron	Patron	Patron	Patron			Patron	Patron
Otto Kahn	Patron		Exec.	Pwt.			P.Rdr.	Pwt.	
Alfred Kreymborg				Pwt.	Exec.		Patron	Exec.	
Lawrence Langner				Patron	Actor		Patron		
Eva Le Gallienne				Exec.	Advis.	Critic			
Kenneth Macgowan				Patron					
Mr. and Mrs. Max				Patron					
Morgenthau Jr.				Patron					
Eugene O'Neill		Patron	Pwt.	Exec.	Patron				
Maria Ouspenskaya		Pwt.	Pwt.	Actor					
Rollo Peters		Lect.	Exec.	Actor					
William Phelps		Lect.	Lect.						
Emanuel Reicher	Patron	Lect.	Lect.						
Oliver Saylor		Prodr.			Dir.	Exec.			
Cleon Throckmorton			Exec.						
Maurice Wertheim			Desnr.						
			Patron						

Desnr: Designer, Dir: Director, Exec: Executive Member, Lect: Lecturer,  
P.R: Public Relations, P.Rdr: Play Reader, Pwt: Playwright.

even to each other's organizations, as the Civic Repertory and the Guild subscribed to the Provincetown.

Thus the Art Theatres developed their informal bonds of association. In 1926, they took steps to formalize this relationship for their mutual benefit. As early as November 1925, Eleanor Fitzgerald, Business Manager of the Provincetown, had written in the Evening Post:

I do not feel that I stretch the point when I say that all the theatre groups in New York, the Theatre Guild, the Neighborhood Playhouse ... the Greenwich Village Theatre and the Provincetown have common cause. I should like some day to see a federated subscription drive whereby we could together offer the public a share of these enterprises.<sup>1</sup>

In April 1926, the Sun reported a 'Plan to Finance All Art Theatres Is Being Formed':

Manny Strauss is the originator of the idea which has for its main object the establishment of a clearing house which will have the authority to pass on all financial projects for productions and provide the ways and means .... There has been a remarkable increase in the number of independent theatres and in the number of fine plays they are bringing to New York; and there has been an increase in the number of businessmen who have realized the importance of these theatres to the future of the country and have been willing to support them. But there has been no adequate agency to bring together the producing and supporting groups. The theatre artists have found themselves hampered in their creative work and their groups disorganized because they had to turn their energies to financing activities with which they were unfamiliar. They not only have lost time from their art, but their lack of knowledge of the methods of underwriting

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1. November 16, 1925. Clipping, NYPL.TC.



has made them lose many prospective supporters who might have been interested if the facts had been properly presented. With this in mind, some of us have come to the conclusion that a saving can be effectual for everybody concerned if a clearing house is established, this clearing house to centre the information about independent theatres and to help each group to help itself .... It should be especially kept in mind that the clearing house will not be a collecting agency for any one producing organization .... The clearing house organizers realize that endowment or underwriting must not interfere with the individuality or autonomy of any group, or carry the privilege of interference in its artistic policy or practice.<sup>1</sup>

The scheme served five organizations in practice: the Provincetown, the Neighborhood Playhouse and three other smaller groups not brought into this study.<sup>2</sup> The Advisory Committee included many prominent members associated with other Art Theatres: Augustin Duncan (Neighborhood Playhouse, Theatre Guild, American Laboratory Theatre), Charles Rann Kennedy (Little Theatre), Edith Wynne Matthison (New Theatre, Little Theatre), Lee Simonson (Washington Square Players, Theatre Guild) and Blanche Yurka (Theatre Guild). The patron Otto Kahn figured as Honorary Chairman. At a meeting in October 1926 to assess their work, the Chairman Manny Strauss discussed the problems and achievements of the Provincetown, the Playhouse and the Guild. The view was expressed that such meetings

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1. April 17, 1926.

2. They were: the International Theatre Arts Institute; the Actors' Theatre, with which the Greenwich Village Theatre of Macgowan, Jones and O'Neill had merged in 1926; and the Stagers, also composed of a number of members associated with the Art Theatre group such as Edward Goodman (Washington Square Players), Margaret Wycherly (Provincetown, Theatre Guild) and Marjorie Vonnegut (Washington Square Players, Theatre Guild).

should be a regular event, formally bringing together activists and supporters of the Art Theatres.<sup>1</sup>

The 'clearing house' scheme however was not long-lived. Probably it did not outlast the 1926-27 season. But a parallel scheme, developed in the same period, was more successful. This was the Subscription Theatre Group organization, bringing together a different group of theatres. In 1926, Stella Hanau undertook centralized promotional work for the Provincetown and Neighborhood Playhouse. The Theatre Guild, the New Playwrights' Theatre and the Civic Repertory Theatre joined the organization the following year. At first her office was based in Macdougall Street, where she edited all the programmes and solicited advertisements. The venture was then taken over by National Program Publishers of 45, West 45th. Street (later 286, Fifth Avenue), where the same connections were maintained.

Commonly held ideals, mobility of personnel, contacts formal and informal, on a variety of levels, made for a coherency and homogeneity among the organizations so that they are reasonably considered as a group - the 'Art Theatre movement' - which I hope this study has done something to define.

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In this study, I have discussed the background to the Art Theatre movement, sought a useful definition of 'Art Theatre' and

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1. 'Independent Theatres Dinner', Leaflet, October, 1926. NYPL.TC.

introduced ten representative organizations. I have tried to draw their ideals together in comparison, to consider how these ideals were carried into effect and to describe further relationships which gathered them into the homogeneous movement they were.

In staying so closely within this framework, I have neglected many other significant facets of the Art Theatres, which reflect as many different aspects of American life. The Art Theatres of New York City, to say nothing of the large number of similar and related organizations across the United States, might also be of interest to students of history in their political, social and general cultural aspects. The Art Theatres were caught up in their own times. Their members were outward-looking and often as involved in other affairs as ever they were with the theatre. Their environments attracted free-thinkers of every sort, stimulated the interchange of ideas on a wide variety of subjects and fostered other activities, such as the cult of Bohemianism, feminist crusades and Communism. They were a meeting place for a number of urban social groups - 'society', professionals, intellectuals, manual workers, immigrants, even Blacks - offering insights into their behaviour and interrelationships. They exemplified the possibility of an alternative community of economic values at a time when the dominant economic forces were the individualism and materialism of a cruder capitalism than that of today. They represent an important arena in which the long drawn out conflict between American and European culture was continued. And the Art Theatres provided the important, formative years for many artists, some of whom went on to greater renown



in the theatre, in Hollywood, or in other branches of art.

Although these Art Theatres were of a particular period and a particular country, their experiences may have something to tell present and future members of similar organizations, wherever they may be. There may need to be more awareness of the problems associated with ideologically motivated theatres: the translation of ideal into effect, economic systems and their development, group co-operation, members demanding higher standards to sustain their interests, expansion and so on.

Again, this study raises some questions about which there is perhaps not enough information to provide satisfactory answers. It would be interesting, for example, to document the connection between the American and European Art Theatres. It should be possible to get a very clear picture of the permeation of ideas from one continent to another by looking more closely at published material concerning European companies like the Abbey Theatre and Moscow Art Theatre which visited the United States and individual Americans like Alice and Irene Lewisohn, Winthrop Ames and Robert Edmund Jones who visited Europe in search of ideas. Then there are many other Art Theatres in New York City and across the United States, some of which I mentioned in the Preface, which might have their interesting and illuminating stories documented. It would be interesting, too to explore the connections between the Art Theatres of New York City and those scattered through other large and small towns. This could be done by looking at the tours of the New York organizations, the companies they themselves entertained at their theatres in

New York and the many individuals who, having served an apprenticeship in the city, founded Art Theatres outside New York. Further study might attempt to document in detail the impact of the Art Theatres on commercial artistic policies and theatrical affairs. Although such an investigation would certainly involve a great element of speculation, there is substantial evidence to start from: members of Art Theatres who moved across to the commercial theatre, commercial producers who watched the 'shop-window' stages of the Art Theatres, the uptown Art Theatre productions, specific artistic and organizational ideas taken up by commercial producers, and so on. But these are all matters for future study.

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